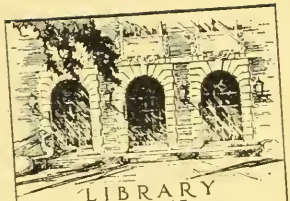

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MERRY ENGLAND.

MERRY ENGLAND:

OR,

NOBLES AND SERFS.

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH,

AUTHOR OF
"THE TOWER OF LONDON," "BOSCOBEL," ETC.

"In order that gentlemen and others may take example and correct wicked rebels, I will most amply detail how this business was conducted."

FROISSART.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.
1874.

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TO

RALPH FAWSETT AINSWORTH, M.D.

F.R.C.P.E., F.L.S.,

ETC. ETC.

NOW fulfil a promise, long ago made to myself, to dedicate a book to you.

Accept from me, therefore, this Story of the Conspiracy and Insurrection of the Serfs in 1381—an outbreak as remarkable for the rapidity of its progress, as for its sudden and complete suppression.

Had the Rebellion been successful, in the opinion of Froissart, who, as a contemporary, was well able to judge, the nobles and

R. K. JOHNSON
MAR 27 1952

gentlemen of England would have entirely disappeared.

It is quite certain that the citizens of London were favourably disposed to the insurgents, and willing to aid them. "They are our friends," they said to the Lord Mayor, "and what they are doing is for our good." But the hour of freedom was not come for the villeins. Another century of servitude had to be borne. Quoth old Thomas of Walsingham, addressing the serfs on the unsuccessful revolt, "Villeins you were, and still are, and in bondage ye shall remain." *Rustici quidem fuistis, et estis, et in bondagio permanebitis.*

All the terms granted to the rebellious serfs by Richard II. in his hour of peril were revoked, and his grants of pardon and enfranchisement broken and annulled.

When the young king asked the nobles if they would sign charts of freedom for the serfs, they exclaimed indignantly, "Heaven forbid! Rather than sign such charts, we would all perish in a single day! Better lose life than our heritages!"

Froissart, Thomas of Walsingham, Henry Knyghton, Grafton, Holinshed, and Stow have furnished the materials of this Tale, which pretends to be little more than a picturesque chronicle.

Such as it is, I offer it to you, in remembrance of past days!

Ere saying adieu, let me congratulate you on your recent floricultural triumph.

Several years' patience, only to be endured by an enthusiast, have been rewarded by the production of a perfectly new, and exquisitely beautiful hybrid orchid, described

as a "large, lovely white flower of great elegance of form, and with plum-coloured lip," and which justly merits the name conferred upon it of *Dendrobium Ainsworthii*.

Compared with this, what is a literary success!

Your affectionate Cousin,

W. Harrison Ainsworth.

Little Rockley, Hurstpierpoint.

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BOOK I.

THE INSURRECTION.

MERRY ENGLAND;

OR,

NOBLES AND SERFS.

I.

THE SMITH, THE FRIAR, AND THE OUTLAW.

AT the pleasant village of Dartford, in Kent, in 1381, and in the fifth of Richard II., there dwelt a smith named Wat Tyler.

Somewhat above the middle height, and very powerfully built, he had a broad, manly visage, characterized by a stern expression, and his deep-set eyes possessed a latent fire very easily kindled. His dark locks were clipped close to his head, so as to reveal a

massive brow, but his beard was bushy and overgrown.

The smith's ordinary apparel was well calculated to display his stalwart frame, and consisted of a coarse, brown serge tunic, with skirts reaching below the girdle, long russet hose, and sandals fastened with thongs.

When he went forth he put on a hood that covered his head, neck, and shoulders, and only left the face visible. Attached to his girdle were a pouch and a dagger, the latter being of his own manufacture.

It was a sight to see the lusty smith in his leather apron, with his brawny arms bared to the shoulders, making the sparks fly as he beat the glowing iron on the anvil. When surrounded by his men, most of whom were built on his own robust model, he looked like Vulcan amid the Cyclops.

Wat Tyler was in the prime of manhood,

not being more than forty. He was married, and had one child, a daughter, whom he loved as the apple of his eye. Rough with all others, he was ever gentle with her.

He had not always been a smith. In his younger days he was an archer, and drew as strong a bow as a Sherwood forester. A vassal of Sir Eustace de Valletort, he formed part of the train of that noble knight, and accompanied his lord to the wars in France and Bretagne. In some rude encounters with the enemy, he had the good fortune to attract the notice both of the Black Prince and the Duke of Lancaster. Severely wounded at the siege of Rennes, he was left for dead, but recovered, and eventually returned with Sir Eustace to England.

At this period all the peasants were serfs, being unable to abandon the small portion of land which they cultivated, or quit the service of their lords, who could compel

them to follow them to the wars, or sell them with their habitations, their cattle, their implements of labour, and their families. In short, the villeins, as they were termed, were in the same wretched state of bondage that they had been after the Conquest; freedom being rarely granted save on payment of a heavy fine.

When Wat Tyler went to the wars he was a bondman, but on his return, in consideration of his good service, he was emancipated by his lord, and enabled to establish himself as a smith at his native village of Dartford. Being skilful at his work, he found plenty of employment; and it was said that he could make a stronger breastplate and a better skull-cap than any armourer in Kent.

But though he had little reason to complain, Wat was a discontented man. Of late he had become more sullen than hereto-

fore, and seemed brooding over some secret wrong. Could we penetrate the inmost recesses of his breast, we should find it occupied by fierce and turbulent thoughts, by intense hatred of the noble and the rich, by a burning desire of vengeance upon the oppressors of the people, and by a fixed determination to divide all property among the lower classes, should the great revolt of the commonalty, which he felt assured would speedily take place, be crowned with success.

Ever since the accession of Richard II. to the throne, in 1377, strong symptoms of popular agitation had been manifest, though they had been disregarded by the nobles, who felt secure of their power; but now the storm that had so long been brewing seemed likely to burst, and with extraordinary fury.

The youthful monarch, who was now in

his sixteenth year, was governed by his uncles, the Duke of Lancaster and the Earls of Cambridge and Buckingham, subsequently created Dukes of Cambridge and Gloucester, and their exactions and severity had exasperated the people almost beyond endurance.

Moreover, Richard had several rapacious favourites, the chief among them being his two half-brothers, the Earl of Kent and Sir John Holland, the Earls of Salisbury, Warwick, and Suffolk, and Sir Richard le Scrope, steward of the household; and these helped to drain the royal exchequer, which needed constant replenishment.

Added to all, in consequence of the continual and fruitless wars with France, the expenses of the nobles and knights, who vied with each other in the number and splendour of their trains, were excessive,

and could only be maintained by repeated exactions from the serfs.

At length the miserable peasants determined to throw off the yoke under which they laboured. Secret meetings took place among them in several parts of Kent and Essex, and a great league of the commons was formed for the purpose of compelling the nobles, knights, and gentlemen to renounce the privileges they had so shamefully abused.

A mysterious mode of communication was devised, by means of which the members of the association could correspond with each other without danger of discovery.

The chief contriver of this extensive and dangerous conspiracy was Wat Tyler, who aspired to be the leader of the insurrection, and, from his daring and resolute character, he seemed well fitted for the post.

One of Wat Tyler's confederates in the re-

volutionary scheme, and who lent the seditious smith great aid, was a Franciscan friar, named John Ball, a professed disciple of the great religious reformer, John Wycliffe, whose doctrines were then extremely popular.

Clad in his grey gown, and girded with a cord, the barefooted friar went from village to village throughout Kent, preaching equality, the necessity of a general partition of property, and the abolition of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

"My good friends," he said to the peasants who collected to hear him, "things cannot go on well in England, nor ever will, until everything shall be in common; when there shall neither be vassal nor lord, and all distinctions levelled; when the lords shall be no more masters than ourselves. How ill have they used us! and for what reason do they hold us in bondage? Are we not all descended from the same parents, Adam and

Eve? And what can they show, and what reason give, why they should be more the masters than we ourselves? They are clothed in velvets and rich stuffs, ornamented with ermine and other furs, while we are forced to wear poor cloth. They have wines, spices, and fine bread, when we have only rye, and water to drink. We are called slaves, and if we do not perform our services we are beaten. Let us go to the King, who is young, and remonstrate with him on our servitude, telling him we must have it otherwise, or we shall find a remedy for it ourselves."

Inflammatory preaching like this, addressed to an ignorant peasantry, half-maddened by the cruelty and injustice with which they were treated, could not fail to produce the effect intended.

All who listened to the factious monk resolved to shake off their chains, and be free.

Not content with haranguing the peasants, John Ball sent a letter secretly to the head man in each village, couched in the following terms:—

> "John Ball greets you well;
> Soon you'll hear the signal bell.
> When it sounds, rise suddenly:
> And, as you would freemen be,
> Hold together steadfastly,
> In brotherhood and unity.
> Nothing fear,
> The end is near—
> The end you hope for—Liberty."

John Ball's proceedings, not being conducted with sufficient caution, came to the knowledge of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who caused him to be arrested.

The Archbishop looked upon him as a half-crazed enthusiast, affected by the heresies of Wycliffe, but had no idea of the mischief he was doing, or he would have put him to death. As it was he imprisoned him in the barbacan of the old castle of Canterbury,

destroyed by Louis of France in the time of King John.

Another important member of the league, but of a very different stamp from the friar, was an outlaw and captain of robbers, whose real name was Guibald le Mauduit, though he had assumed the appellation of Jack Straw.

Having been guilty of a trespass on a royal forest in the reign of Edward III.—in other words, of killing deer, a heinous offence in those days, and punishable with death—Guibald fled to avoid the consequences of his act, and, since he could not be captured, he was outlawed, and a price set on his head.

He was soon joined by several marauders, fugitives from justice like himself; and, being superior to the rest of his lawless companions, was chosen as their leader; and a very determined leader he proved, and

enforced the strictest obedience to his commands.

Jack Straw and his band speedily became the terror of all travellers in Kent; and, to avoid being plundered, the numerous pilgrims to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket, at Canterbury, were obliged to be guarded by an escort.

But the robber-chief modelled his conduct on that of another renowned outlaw, Robin Hood; and while he despoiled the rich without scruple, he gave very liberally to the poor. Hence he had always spies to tell him of the approach of a party of travellers, or to warn him of danger; and though his retreat was well known, it was never discovered by the officers of justice.

For seven years Jack Straw had now been master of the road between Blackheath and Canterbury, and made every traveller he could lay hands upon pay toll.

Almost as soon as an insurrection of the

Kentish peasants was planned, Jack Straw heard of the plot, and immediately sent a faithful messenger to Wat Tyler, offering to join the league, and engaging to bring his followers with him.

The proposal was eagerly accepted; and shortly afterwards a secret meeting took place between the smith and the Outlaw, who were well pleased with each other.

Their feelings were in common. They both hated the nobility, and burnt to avenge the wrongs inflicted on the serfs. Both desired to level all distinctions of rank, and partition all property among the people. And this was singular in the case of Guibald le Mauduit, for, though an outcast, he really belonged to a noble family.

Before separating, each confederate drew his dagger, pierced his left arm, and, as blood flowed from the puncture, they vowed eternal fidelity to each other.

Guibald le Mauduit, or Jack Straw, as we

shall henceforth style him, was some ten years younger than the burly smith. Tall and well-proportioned, he had a spare but sinewy frame, and was exceedingly active; being so swift of foot that he could keep up with a horse at full gallop. More than once he had owed his safety to his remarkable fleetness.

Jack Straw was by no means ill favoured, but his countenance had a sinister expression. His complexion was excessively swarthy—so swarthy as to suggest that the skin must be stained by walnut juice.

Be this as it may, his dark visage, lighted up by a pair of fiercely-flashing eyes, was calculated to inspire terror. His raven locks hung down in disorder; and a shaggy beard, of the same hue, clothed his chin.

The daring Outlaw usually rode a powerful black charger, taken from the Sire de Gommegines, as that baron was on his way to

visit the young King at the Palace of Shene; and all his men were well mounted, for they found no difficulty in providing themselves with steeds. They were, likewise, well armed; some with cross-bows, some with long bows.

Their leader wore a doublet of Kendal green, with a horn slung over his shoulders by a green baldrick; and on his head was a small cap, with a heron's feather stuck in it. Boots of supple leather, fitting close to the leg, and ascending above the knee, completed his picturesque costume. He was armed with a broad-bladed sword and poniard, and a small battle-axe was affixed to his saddle.

Appended to his neck by a slender chain, but entirely concealed by his jerkin, was a small silver case, containing a single straw, brought from the dungeon of St. Peter, at Rome. From this straw, which he devoutly

believed would shield him from a violent death, the Outlaw took his name.

When John Ball was arrested by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Jack Straw found means of communicating with him in his prison, and undertook to deliver him; but the friar bade him not trouble himself about him, saying that his work was done, and that it would be time enough to set him free when the general rising took place.

It was clear that the outbreak could not long be delayed, for the ferment among the people had been heightened by another most obnoxious measure.

A poll-tax of three groats was imposed upon every person, male and female, throughout the kingdom, above fifteen years of age; and as it was foreseen that there would be great difficulty in collecting this tax, it was farmed to a rich company of Lombard merchants, then resident in the City of London.

As might be expected, these merchants proceeded most rigorously; and employed the roughest collectors they could find, enjoining them to let none escape who were liable to the tax.

The collectors set about their task with zeal; and everywhere complaints arose from the people of the brutal usage they experienced from them.

Wat Tyler heard of these murmurs with secret satisfaction. The more the peasants were exasperated, the better it served his purpose.

As yet no collector of the poll-tax had visited Dartford; but its turn would soon come, and then a disturbance might be expected.

II.

EDITHA.

EDITHA, the smith's daughter, was now verging upon fifteen, and, though her charms were not fully developed, she gave promise of remarkable beauty.

Her lineaments were delicately moulded; her eyes blue and limpid, and arched over by dark, pencilled brows; while her tresses were light and fleecy.

She had neither the look nor the manner of a rustic maiden; nor did she bear any personal resemblance to either of her parents. But it will not be wondered at that her manner should be superior to her condition,

when we mention that she had been most carefully instructed by the prioress of St. Mary and St. Margaret, who took especial interest in her.

So much effect had the good prioress's teaching and discourses produced upon the smith's daughter, that the villagers declared that she would end by becoming a nun.

Dame Tyler was three or four years younger than her husband, and still comely. She was rather inclined to gossip with her neighbours; and so little reliance had Wat Tyler in her discretion, that he kept her in complete ignorance of the plot in which he was engaged.

On Whit-Monday morn, in the year previously mentioned—and a most lovely morn it was—a young damsel issued from the Priory gate, and took her way beneath the trees towards the village.

Her footstep was as light as that of a

fawn; and as she tripped along the path, ever and anon pausing to listen to the carolling of the birds, a smile of happiness played upon her charming countenance.

No fairer creature was abroad on that delightful morning than this young damsel. As some old folks who watched her thought, she was an object to gladden the eye.

Her simple attire suited her well. She wore a hood and wimple. Her kirtle was of scarlet sendall, but not too long to hide her small laced buskins. From the girdle that spanned her slender waist hung a rosary of red beads; and she was likewise provided with an aulmoniere, or silken purse, which had been given her by Prioress Isabel. In her hand she carried a mass-book.

As she moved on she met several village maidens, most of them a few years older than herself, but none half so fair.

All of them greeted her, and some stopped for a moment to exchange a few words with her.

"Give you good morrow, gentle Editha!" cried one of these maidens, a comely damsel of nineteen, with a ripe cherry lip and eyes black as a sloe, who was carrying a pail of milk to the Priory. "You will come to the sports this afternoon, I hope? All the lads of the village will be on the green. They are now dressing the May-pole with garlands and flowers, and a band of minstrels from Rochester arrived last night at the 'Bull.' There will be dancing and mumming, and no lack of cakes and Whitsun ale."

Thus spoke Marjory, the milkmaid, a damsel who had many admirers; and she ended by a loud laugh, that displayed her white teeth.

But Editha replied, rather gravely, "The Lady Prioress has given me permission to

view the sports, so I shall come to the green with my mother; but I don't think I shall take any part in them."

"Ah, you'll change your mind when you hear the merry sound of the tabor and pipe!" said Marjory, again laughing.

"I scarcely think so," replied Editha. "I'm sure the Lady Prioress wouldn't approve of my dancing."

"She wont inflict a very severe penance upon you," returned Marjory; "and if you mean to take the vow, I would advise you to enjoy yourself while you can."

"I have no intention of becoming a nun," rejoined Editha. "But I wont do anything to incur Lady Isabel's displeasure."

"No wonder you're such a favourite with her," cried Marjory, rather spitefully.

And she went off with her pail.

As Editha pursued her way homewards she had to pass the green, in the midst of which stood the May-pole.

Already adorned with garlands and ropes of flowers, as Marjory the milkmaid had stated, it looked very pretty; and as she stopped for a moment to gaze at it, several young rustics hastened towards her; but she started off again instantly, and left them.

From the aspect of the usually quiet village, any one might have known it was a fête day. The church bells were ringing joyous peals, and other enlivening sounds were heard.

Preparations for merry-making and festivity at a later hour seemed to be going on at many of the picturesque habitations that formed the long, straggling street leading to the wooden bridge across the silver Darent.

The chief hostel in the village bore the sign of the "Bull," as does the large, comfortable inn that has succeeded it. In front of the "Bull" stood the little band

of minstrels of whom the milkmaid had spoken.

Tall, strong-looking fellows, not much like ordinary minstrels, they were provided with cornet, tabor, and fife. Though urged to play by the crowd collected around, they declined to do so till the sports began.

Like the rest of the villagers, Wat Tyler seemed disposed to give himself a holiday. He did not put out the fire of his forge; but left his men in charge of the smithy, in case they should be called upon to shoe a horse, or do some other work that could not be delayed.

Having put on his hood and tunic, he was preparing to sally forth, when he met his daughter at the door.

"Are you going out for a walk, father?" she asked. "If so, pray take me with you."

"I am going to Dartford Brent," he

replied. "You had better go in to your mother."

But Editha would not be denied.

"That is just the walk I should like," she said. "I want to gather some wild thyme on the downs, and the morning is charming. I must go."

The smith would rather have been without her, but he could not resist her look, and they went on together.

Many an eye followed them as they walked along; and not a few of the beholders were struck by the contrast offered by Wat's burly frame to the slight and graceful figure of his daughter.

In the market-place there were a few women with baskets, containing eggs, butter, and honey; and others with pigeons, ducks, goslings, and freshly-caught trout, for which the Darent was renowned, and they all gathered round the smith; but he made no purchases.

When he drew near the "Bull," one of the minstrels we have described made a sign, and having caught Wat's eye, pointed towards the eastern downs.

The smith nodded his head, to signify that he understood what was meant, and marched on with his daughter.

They were now in St. Edmund's Way, so called from the chantry of St. Edmund Martyr, which stood there. Of such peculiar sanctity was this ancient chapel, that it was always visited by the pilgrims to Canterbury. The priests were now saying mass in the chantry, and Editha would fain have had her father enter, and join them in their devotions, but he heeded not her request.

A little further on was the church, and here again mass was being celebrated. Once more Wat turned a deaf ear to his daughter's entreaties to him to go in, and hastened to cross the wooden bridge over the Darent.

Leaning for a moment over the rails, he saw the trout darting past beneath, and pointed them out to Editha.

They now began to climb the steep side of the hill, which was overgrown with juniper, and when they gained the brow of the eminence a lovely prospect burst upon them.

Both, of course, were familiar with the view, yet they regarded it with as much delight as if they beheld it for the first time. The bright sunshine that lighted up the picture enhanced its beauty.

In the midst of a wide valley, watered by the silver Darent, and by another clear trout stream, called the Cray, and bounded on either side by a range of downs, lay the pretty and picturesque village of Dartford.

Even then, it was not a very small village, and boasted, as we have shown, a church, a priory, and a chantry, the two latter being in great repute.

Indeed, Lady Isabel, the Prioress of St. Mary's, of whom we have already spoken, and several of the nuns, belonged to noble families.

The priory, which had only been founded some five-and-twenty years before the date of our story by Edward III., was a large pile, built of brick, situated at the foot of a softly-sloping hill at the north-west of the village. In the wood near the priory was a hermitage.

Almost immediately beneath those who gazed upon the prospect were the chantry and the church, with the Darent flowing on through the valley, till it was joined by the Cray, when their combined waters formed a creek, deep enough to serve as a harbour for small vessels trading with London.

Water-mills there were on both streams ; but paper-mills and powder-mills were, of course, unknown.

At a short distance beyond the creek we have just described could be seen the Thames; the woody heights on the opposite shore belonged to Essex.

On the left the view was circumscribed by a number of hills, most of them covered with woods, amidst which, here and there, could be distinguished the turrets and castellated walls of some Norman mansion.

At that early period the original aspect of the country was almost unchanged. Much land was uncultivated, and not even cleared; vast tracts being still covered by primæval forests.

Beyond the down, on which Wat Tyler and his daughter stood, contemplating the lovely scene we have attempted to describe, stretched a flat, heathy plain, called Dartford Brent.

It was skirted on the right by a thick wood, which was thought to harbour rob-

bers; for several travellers journeying by that road to Rochester, or coming thence to Dartford, had been plundered of late.

Editha was somewhat surprised, therefore, when her father told her he was going on to a short distance by himself, and bade her sit down on the turf, and read her mass-book till his return.

Without waiting for an answer, he set off at a quick pace in the direction of the wood; but he had not got far, when a band of armed men issued from the thicket, and rode towards him.

From the wild appearance of these men, who were about a dozen in number, Editha could not doubt they were robbers; but it was evident her father had no cause for apprehension, for the leader of the band, who was mounted on a powerful black horse, signed to his followers to halt, and galloping up to the smith, greeted him in a very friendly manner.

Editha was confounded at the sight.

She was reluctant to believe that her father would hold any intercourse with the captain of a band of robbers; yet there he was, standing close to the suspicious-looking horseman, and conversing amicably with him.

III.

OF THE INTERVIEW ON DARTFORD BRENT.

JACK STRAW—for it was he whom Editha beheld conversing with her father—was urgent that the signal for revolt should be given.

"I cannot see what is to be gained by further delay," he said to the smith. "Everywhere the people are ready to rise, and as soon as the standard of rebellion is raised, thousands will join it. In Essex there has already been an outbreak. Two of my emissaries have just returned from Brentwood, with the news that the men of Fobbing have put to flight the Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, and have slain the jurymen and clerks, and stuck their heads

on poles. The whole country will soon be in a flame."

"This occurred at Fobbing, you say?" remarked Wat Tyler.

"Only yesterday," replied the Outlaw. "Thomas de Bampton, the tax commissioner, has been holding a court of taxation at Brentwood; but the men of Fobbing refused to attend him, and the Chief Justice came down to punish them. But they have punished him. Shall we not follow their example?"

"They have had a pretext, which we want," observed the smith.

"But the opportunity ought not to be neglected," pursued the Outlaw. "The King's three uncles are absent. John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, who governs in his youthful nephew's name, and whom we have most reason to dread, is at Roxburgh, seeking to make a truce with the Scots. He

cannot return. Then the Earl of Cambridge is at Plymouth, preparing to set sail to Lisbon, with five hundred men-at-arms, and five hundred archers, to aid the King of Portugal against the King of Castile. The Earl of Buckingham is in Wales. Not one of the three is likely to interfere with us."

"There is no one to resist us, unless it be the King's half-brother, the Earl of Kent," observed Wat Tyler; "and he will not be able to raise an army, for the nobles hate him, and will not serve under him."

"Our march to London will be almost unopposed," said the Outlaw; "and when we arrive there, the citizens will open their gates, and give us a hearty welcome."

"Nay, of a surety, we shall have the Lord Mayor, William Walworth, against us," said Wat Tyler. "Moreover, Sir John Philpot, who levied war on his own account,

and got reprimanded by the council for his pains, will stand by the King. That we shall be masters of London in the end, I nothing doubt; but we must dispose of Walworth and Philpot, and many others, before we shall be secure. You ask me why I hesitate to give the signal for the insurrection when all is ready, and the moment seems propitious. I have delayed because the poll tax is goading the people to madness, as this outbreak in Essex proves, and I want them to be thoroughly roused. They will not then turn back. Besides, we have a duty to perform. We must be true to our friends. Before the rising in this county takes place, John Ball must be delivered from prison, or he will be put to death by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Were that to happen, it would be an eternal reproach to us, since he is the chief contriver of the plot."

"The barbacan in which he is confined is strongly guarded, or I should have already liberated him," rejoined Jack Straw. "But I will make another attempt."

"His deliverance will be best accomplished by stratagem," remarked Wat Tyler. "As I came hither, I noticed that some of your band are in the village, disguised as minstrels."

"I thought you might want assistance in the event of some sudden emergency, so I sent Hugo Morcar and three others to attend your orders. You will have a grand company of pilgrims in Dartford to-day."

"And you mean to wait for them here—eh?" cried Wat Tyler.

"No," replied the Outlaw; "I shall not attack them. 'Tis the Princess of Wales—the King's mother—who is making a pil-

grimage to Canterbury. She will be attended by all her ladies, and escorted by her second son, Sir John Holland, and a large retinue of nobles and knights."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Wat Tyler. "Could you not follow the train to Canterbury? Perchance you might find some means of liberating John Ball."

"I will think the matter over," replied the Outlaw. "The attempt will be fraught with danger, but I care not for that. If aught should occur to you, send a message to me by Morcar. He will know where to find me."

"Good!" said the smith. "Know you at what hour the Princess of Wales may be expected at Dartford?"

"Early in the day," rejoined the other. "She purposes reaching Canterbury to-night."

"You are well informed."

"Ay; few persons travel by this road without my hearing of them. The Princess rested yesterday at the Palace at Eltham, and meant to start on her pilgrimage betimes. On arriving at Dartford, she will visit the Lady Isabel at the priory, and pay her devotions at the chantry of Edmund the Martyr."

"You know more than the people of Dartford themselves. I question much if the Lady Isabel is aware of the honour intended her. My daughter has just come from the priory, and she heard nothing of the Princess's visit."

"Here comes your daughter," said the Outlaw, directing his attention to Editha, who was speeding towards them. "She has something to tell you."

"She ought not to have quitted the spot where I left her," said the smith, frowning.

Bidding his confederate a hasty adieu, he was about to depart, when Editha, who ran with great swiftness, came up.

Wat Tyler looked angry, but the Outlaw was glad of the opportunity afforded him of exchanging a word with the fair damsel.

He did not ride off, therefore, as Wat hoped he would, but saluted her respectfully.

"Give you good day, fair maiden," he said, with a smile that sat very ill on his grim visage.

Editha returned his salutation, but not without visible embarrassment, for she could not conceal the mingled terror and aversion with which he inspired her.

In reply to her father, who chided her for disobeying his injunctions, she said, "I thought you would like to know that some great persons have just arrived at the village. There was quite a long cavalcade of

nobles, knights, esquires, and ladies, one of whom was magnificently attired, and rode a richly-trapped palfrey. I could see her quite distinctly from where I stood on the brow of the hill. The ladies with her looked younger than she did, but were not so richly dressed, though they all wore silks and velvets; but her apparel glittered in the sunshine like gold. A thought crossed me that it might be the King's mother, the Princess of Wales."

"You guessed rightly, fair damsel," observed the Outlaw, nothing abashed by the coldness with which Editha regarded him; "it was the Princess of Wales. Her Highness is performing a pilgrimage to Canterbury."

"The Lady Isabel has always told me the Princess is very devout and good, and passes much time in prayer," said Editha. And she added, earnestly, "I hope St. Ed-

mund and St. Thomas, and all good saints, will watch over her, and guard her from every danger—especially from robbers who may lie in ambush to fall upon her."

"Her Highness has too strong an escort with her, as you may have remarked, fair damsel, to be in any danger from robbers," rejoined the Outlaw. "But were she wholly unattended, I am sure no one would molest her."

"I am glad to hear you say so," observed Editha. "The widow of the Black Prince, and the mother of the King, ought to be safe everywhere in England."

"Go to, child; the Princess is not the friend of the people," observed Wat Tyler, sternly.

"Nay, dear father, I have heard quite the contrary," replied Editha. "The Prioress, who always speaks truth, says she is very compassionate and charitable, distributes

large alms among the poor, and would redress all grievances if she could."

"She must have some influence over her royal son," said Wat Tyler. "Why does she not induce him to make all men free—to relieve them from the tyranny of the nobles —to mete out even justice—and to lessen the taxes? If she did this, the people would bless her."

"She does all she can, I doubt not, dear father. But the young King may have ill counsellors."

"Ay, marry has he; but they will be speedily removed."

"Do you mean that he will be forced to dismiss them, father?"

"Mark my words, child. Ere a month shall have passed, the young King will have other and better counsellors; who will tell him plainly what the people want, and what must be conceded to them, if he would continue to reign."

"Then you think a change is at hand, father?"

"I am sure of it, child—a great change. Many will be hurled from their high places, never to rise again! They cannot resist the power that will be directed against them—the power of a long-enslaved people, who have burst their fetters, and are determined to assert their rights!"

"I do not like to hear you talk thus, dear father," said Editha. "I hope the people will not rebel. They may be treated with unjust severity by their lords; but if they complain to the King, he will redress their wrongs."

"They will not sue for justice, but insist upon it!" rejoined Wat Tyler.

"And they will speak in language that cannot be misunderstood, and to which the King has been hitherto unaccustomed," observed the Outlaw.

"I am too young to advise you, dear father," said Editha; "and I would not pre-

sume to speak did I not fear you may place yourself in fearful jeopardy by aiding this rebellious scheme, which, I can perceive, is on foot. Take no part in it, as you value your safety!"

"You are wise beyond your years, child," said her father; "and are better able to give advice than many of your elders. But your discernment fails you now. You are ignorant of the sufferings of the people, and of their utter inability to obtain redress."

"Surely they can obtain redress by lawful means?"

"No!" replied her father, sternly; "justice is utterly denied them. They have borne their burthen till it has become unsupportable; and they must cast it off, or sink under the weight. The nobles have had repeated warnings; and if they will not heed them, they must take the consequences."

"They shall not tyrannize over us much longer!" said the Outlaw. "We will sweep them all from the face of the land!"

"And seize upon their possessions—is that what you mean?" cried Editha, with disgust. "Father," she added, turning to him, "the cause cannot be good that renders it necessary to associate with lawless men."

Wat Tyler repressed the angry remark that rose to his lips; and changing his manner suddenly, said, "You think we have been talking seriously, child."

"Have you not?" she cried, eagerly.

Her father replied by a rough laugh, in which the Outlaw joined.

"Not we!" said the latter. "I but carried on the jest started by your father—ho, ho!"

"'Tis for poor men to rebel," added Wat Tyler. "I have too much to do, and gain too much."

"And I can help myself to what I want!" laughed the Outlaw. "The nobles must submit to my exactions; not I to theirs."

Editha did not seem convinced by these assertions; but, being anxious to get her father away, she made a movement to depart, saying she wished to see the Princess of Wales.

With a significant glance at the Outlaw, Wat Tyler immediately followed her.

"I hope you will have nothing to do with that man, dear father," she remarked, as they walked along. "His appearance terrifies me!"

"Oh, you will get accustomed to him in time."

"Never! I shall never be able to endure him! But he will not dare to enter the village, so I am not likely to behold him again."

Wat Tyler made no reply to this observation, and they went on in silence.

The Outlaw's thoughts dwelt upon Editha as he rode back to his men.

"A lovely creature!" he mentally ejaculated. "I must ask her father to give her to me as a wife. He cannot refuse; and her own consent is unnecessary."

IV.

HOW THE PRINCESS OF WALES VISITED THE PRIORESS OF ST. MARY AND ST. MARGARET.

JOHANNA, daughter of Edward of Woodstock, widow of the Black Prince, and mother of Richard II., had been accounted the most beautiful woman in the kingdom, and she was still superbly handsome.

By her first husband, Sir John Holland, who, in right of his wife, was created Earl of Kent and Lord Wake of Lydell, she had two sons, the elder of whom succeeded to the title on the death of his father, while the other was merely Sir John Holland. Both were proud and ambitious, and great favourites with the young King.

Owing to the death of her renowned consort in the lifetime of his father, Edward III., the Princess of Wales never rose to the throne. Devotedly attached to her son Richard, she constantly prayed that he might become a great warrior like his sire.

She dreaded John of Gaunt, believing that he designed to dethrone her son; but she had equal reason to fear the baneful influence exercised over the young King by his two half-brothers. Maternal partiality, however, blinded her to their faults.

The Princess was not ignorant of the general discontent caused among the common people by the capitation tax; but she did not apprehend any serious result, far less imagine that an insurrection was imminent.

It was at the instance of the Archbishop of Canterbury that she had undertaken her present pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas-à-Becket.

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She was accompanied in the journey by her ladies, all of whom were high-born damsels of great beauty; by a numerous and splendid retinue of nobles and knights, at the head of whom was her handsome and haughty son, Sir John Holland; by her confessor, her physician, her almoner, esquires, pages, yeomen, and grooms, all in the royal liveries; two yeomen ushers, two grooms, two pages, and a guard of armed men.

Though the Princess of Wales was no longer the peerless beauty, who, as the widowed Countess of Kent, had captivated that flower of English knighthood, the brave Edward of England, Prince of Wales and Aquitaine, she was still, as we have already said, exceedingly handsome, and possessed great dignity of manner.

Her complexion was ravishingly fair, and her dark tresses, arranged in thick square

plaits at the side of the face, set off her finely cut features.

At the back of her head she wore a caul, adorned with precious stones, from which streamed a long contoise. Her gown, of satin tissue, fitted tightly at the waist, so as to display her charming figure, and was sufficiently long to cover her feet. Her cyclas, or upper tunic, was of cloth of gold. Her girdle, which hung loose above the hips, was studded with gems. From it was suspended a *gipciere*, or purse of crimson velvet, adorned with gold lace tassels. Nor can it be supposed that she was unprovided with a rosary.

The trappings of her palfrey were of blue velvet, embroidered all over in gold and silver thread, with the royal badge of the white hart, crowned and chained, the sun emerging from a cloud, and the *planta genista*, or bloom plant.

Thus splendidly arrayed, the Princess of Wales completely outshone the troop of noble damsels by whom she was attended. Yet they were the fairest ornaments of the Court; surpassingly beautiful, and richly attired. But they paled before her like stars in the presence of the queen of night.

Sir John Holland possessed a tall and graceful figure, set off by rich apparel; but his handsome features were marred by an expression of pride and arrogance. He rode a high-mettled Andalusian jennet, given him by the Duke of Lancaster, and the impatient movements of the fiery horse accorded with his own haughty deportment.

He was accoutred in a light blue tunic, interwoven with threads of gold and silver, fitting tightly to his person, but having loose sleeves. A short two-edged sword hung from his side, and a *gipciere* was attached to his girdle. His hose were parti-

coloured, blue and white, and his red Morocco leather boots had enormously long peaked points—then called cracowes—fastened to the knees with chains of gold, and preventing the use of the stirrup. His spurs were of gold.

On his dark-brown locks, cut short, and square on the forehead, but allowed to hang down on the side, he wore a blue velvet cap, trimmed with costly fur, and having an ostrich feather at the back, that drooped over the head, and was secured by a diamond clasp.

We have been thus minute in describing the rich attire of the young King's half-brother, because we desire to give some notion of the splendour affected by the Court gallants of the period.

Indeed, all the young nobles and knights who now formed the Princess's equipage wore velvet doublets and mantles of varied

hues, and more or less richly embroidered, particoloured hose and cracowes.

The royal confessor and almoner rode upon mules, and could easily be distinguished amid the gaily attired throng, by their dark stoles and hoods.

Sumpter-mules followed, laden with trunks, containing change of apparel for the Princess and her ladies; and the armed escort brought up the rear.

After descending the hill, the *cortége* proceeded to the priory, the gardens and outbuildings of which extended to the foot of the down.

A harbinger, apparelled in the royal livery, had been sent on to announce the approach of the Princess, so that her arrival was expected.

Passing through the embattled gateway, in front of which a considerable number of villagers, of both sexes, were collected round

the procession, the Princess and her suite entered the spacious courtyard; the armed men being left outside the gate.

Beneath the deep-arched doorway of the religious edifice, with a cluster of nuns behind her in white angular head-dresses and gorgets, was stationed the Prioress, awaiting her royal visitor.

So rigid was the attitude of the Lady Isabel, that as she stood there, with her arms folded upon her breast, in her loose white woollen robe, worked with a cross, with her coverchief on her head, and a pleated linen barbe beneath her chin, she looked like a sculptured effigy on a tomb.

The only signs of life discernible in her pale and motionless features came from the eyes.

With the assistance of the grooms, the Princess alighted from her palfrey, and attended by the pages, and followed by the

whole of her ladies, stepped towards the Prioress, who advanced to meet her in a very stately manner, and stretching her arms over her, as she bent reverently, pronounced a benison upon her.

This ceremonial performed, the Lady Superior bade her royal visitor welcome, and conducted her into the priory.

V.

THE PRIORESS OF ST. MARY AND ST. MARGARET, DARTFORD.

ISABEL DE CAVERSHAM, Prioress of St. Mary and St. Margaret, belonged to a noble family; and before her retirement from the world—now some fifteen years ago—had been distinguished for grace and beauty. Knights had worn her colours and contended for her smiles.

Once the fairest of the fair, the Lady Isabel had become prematurely old; her dark tresses were streaked with grey, and though her face still retained its noble outline, its softness and comeliness had fled.

Yet she was barely thirty-five. Never

now did a smile play upon her thin lips; but though her looks were severe, and her manner cold, her heart was full of kindness and compassion.

Among the sisterhood she had no special favourites, though several were high-born like herself; but she was greatly attached, as we have shown, to the smith's daughter, Editha, who had been brought to her, when a child, by Dame Tyler, and whom she had caused to be carefully instructed by Sister Eudoxia, one of the elder nuns.

The Lady Isabel led her royal visitor to the refectory, a large hall, wainscoted with dark oak, and provided with two long, narrow tables and benches for the sisterhood, and an elevated table for the Prioress and her guests.

At the upper end of the hall was a large painted wooden carving of the crucifixion. Midway was a reading-desk, from which

grace was said before each meal. At the bottom of the hall were open hatches, communicating with the kitchens, whence the simple fare allotted to the sisterhood was brought.

All the domestics were lay sisters, and wore the habits of the order. They were now garnishing the upper table, while the nuns were assembled in the centre of the hall.

Shortly after the entrance of the Princess her ladies made their appearance; and several of them having relatives among the nuns, affectionate greetings took place. Thus mingled together, the gaily-attired damsels and the saintly sisters in their woollen robes and white head-dresses and wimples, formed a curious picture.

The only male persons privileged to enter the nunnery were the confessor and the almoner, and they were presented to the Lady Superior by the Princess. Nobles,

knights, and esquires were compelled to remain without in the courtyard. Even the pages were excluded.

All being arranged on the upper table, the Prioress besought her royal guest to take some refreshment; but the latter declined, telling the Lady Isabel that she wished to confer with her in private.

On this, the Prioress signed to a dignified nun, whom she addressed as Sister Sulpicia, and bade her take her place; after which she quitted the hall with the Princess, and conducted her to a locutory, or parlour, on the other side of the building.

They were preceded by Sister Eudoxia, the elderly nun of whom we have spoken; and having ushered them into the locutory, the sedate sister, whose countenance seemed as if it could never be ruffled, immediately retired.

The locutory, which was used by the

Prioress and the sisters for conversation, differed little from an ordinary parlour of the period. It was furnished with high-backed oak chairs, one of which, more elaborately carved than the rest, and provided with a brocaded cushion and a velvet footstool, was reserved for the Lady Superior. Near this was a small oak table. The walls were hung with tapestry. The bay windows were filled with stained glass, that gave a dim, religious light to the room, and adorned with a picture of the Madonna.

No sooner was the door of the locutory closed by Sister Eudoxia, than a remarkable change took place in the deportment both of the Prioress and her royal guest.

As yet, they had given no sign of previous acquaintance. Now it was certain they were old friends. After gazing at each other affectionately for a few moments, they embraced as tenderly as sisters.

VI.

OF THE COUNSEL GIVEN BY THE LADY ISABEL TO THE PRINCESS.

WHEN the first effusions of delight were over, the Lady Isabel begged the Princess to take the state-chair, and sat down opposite her.

"I did not think I should ever see your Grace again," she said. "But though many years have flown since we met, my love for you is in nowise diminished, and you have rarely been absent from my thoughts. But you have never come near me!" she added, in a tone of slight reproach.

"You know why I have not visited you, dearest Isabel," replied the Princess, "so I need make no excuse. I hope you are

happy. I did not expect to find you so much changed."

"I am as happy as I am ever likely to be in this world," said the Prioress, mournfully, for some painful recollections had evidently rushed upon her. "You yourself have had a great sorrow; but the affliction you have undergone has not impaired your beauty."

"I marvel at it, for I have suffered much and deeply," rejoined the Princess; "but I have been obliged to smother my grief. When I lost the noblest, the bravest, the best husband ever possessed by woman, I should have followed your example, and have retired to a convent, had it not been for the Prince, my son. But I promised his royal father, who foresaw the danger he would incur when he came to the throne from his ambitious uncles, that I would watch constantly over him, and I have kept my word. Only by ceaseless vigilance have

I preserved the young King from their designs. You may think I have uncontrolled authority, but I have little real power. Richard is surrounded by favourites and flatterers, and will not always listen to my advice."

"Be not discouraged, gracious madam!" said the Prioress, earnestly. "Persevere in your efforts to keep the youthful King in the right course, and make him worthy of his illustrious father. I would you had power to redress the grievances of the people, who suffer much from oppression; and if their complaints continue unheeded, I fear they will break out into open rebellion. I do not desire to alarm your Grace; but I must not conceal from you that there is great murmuring among the peasantry in this part of Kent, and also, as I understand, in Essex."

"Discontent everywhere prevails," said

the Princess, "and unhappily there is good cause for it. But an insurrection would serve the Duke of Lancaster's purpose, as it might end in the King's dethronement, and enable the Duke to seize the crown. Therefore the people are goaded on instead of being quieted."

"Is it possible the King can be insensible to this danger?" asked the Prioress.

"He has perfect faith in the loyalty of his uncles, and will not believe me when I warn him against them. He thinks my apprehensions groundless."

"Have you lost your influence over him?"

"Not entirely. But I must confess it is less than it used to be. I have told you the King is surrounded by flatterers, who are secretly adverse to me."

"By counteracting their designs, you cannot fail to regain your influence over

your son. But your first business must be to save him from his present danger. Believe me, it can only be averted by making large concessions to the people."

"Were I to propose such a measure as you recommend, I should array all the nobles against me. Besides, I am certain the Council of State would reject it."

"Not if the King insists. Something must be promptly done to allay the present agitation, or great calamities will inevitably ensue. The throne itself may be shaken."

Pronounced with great solemnity, these words could not fail to produce a strong effect upon the listener.

"Give heed to my warning, Princess," pursued the Lady Isabel, with increased earnestness of tone. "Let not the King hesitate, or he may be forced into compliance."

"Ha!" exclaimed the Princess; "you

have heard more than you choose to tell me."

"I have heard more than I dare repeat," rejoined the Prioress. "Had I not seen your Grace to-day, it was my intention to write to you."

"Can you give me any proofs of the dangerous design you apprehend, that I may lay them before the King?" demanded the Princess.

"Impossible! But I may perhaps obtain more precise information before you return from Canterbury. Think you not, since the danger is so imminent, that you ought to put off your pilgrimage?"

"I cannot," replied the Princess. "I have a vow to fulfil."

"Prolong not your stay more than is needful. Haply your Grace may think I exaggerate the peril, and am unduly apprehensive; but I have good reason for my

fears. There is a smith in this village, whose daughter, Editha, comes daily to receive instruction from Sister Eudoxia, and from this damsel I have learnt much that has led me to make further inquiries, the result being to convince me that a rising of the peasantry is to be apprehended. The mischievous doctrines of the apostate priest, Wycliffe, who preaches equality and the partition of property, have been disseminated among the people by a Franciscan friar, named John Ball, and the seeds of sedition being thus scattered broadcast, are now producing a plentiful crop. Wycliffe deserves death. Neither the King nor our holy Church have a worse enemy. He would overthrow both."

"Wycliffe is protected by the Duke of Lancaster, and is therefore safe from punishment," observed the Princess. "Should it chance that the smith's daughter of whom

you have just spoken is in the priory at this moment, I would fain question her."

"I will ascertain at once," replied the Lady Superior.

And she struck a small silver bell placed upon the table.

The summons was immediately answered by Sister Eudoxia, who, in reply to the Prioress's inquiries, said that Editha had just come in, and had gone to the novitiate.

"Bring her hither," said the Lady Isabel. "The Princess desires to speak to her."

Much pleased by the order, Sister Eudoxia hastened to obey it.

"I am not sorry your Grace should see the young damsel," continued the Prioress. "I take great interest in her. She is very good and very gentle, and I hope may become a novice. But she is not yet old enough to profess."

"What is her age?" inquired the Princess.

"Scarce fifteen," was the reply.

"She must have been born about the time you entered this retreat," observed the Princess.

Made quite inadvertently, this remark caused the Lady Isabel to become pale as death, and the Princess regretted that she had uttered it.

VII.

THE LAPIS LAZULI TABLET.

SHORTLY afterwards Editha was ushered into the locutory of Sister Eudoxia, who immediately retired.

The young damsel made a profound obeisance to the Princess, and then inclining to the Lady Superior, kissed her hand.

Struck by her remarkable beauty and composure of manner, the Princess contemplated her with surprise, not unmixed with curiosity.

"This fair girl cannot be a smith's daughter," she remarked, in an under-tone, to the Prioress.

"'Tis as I have stated," rejoined the Lady Isabel.

"And her mother?"

"Is a very worthy dame of like degree."

For a moment the Princess seemed lost in reflection.

Then with a very gracious smile, she addressed Editha.

"Have you always dwelt in Dartford, child?" she asked.

"Always, your Grace," was the reply; "and I have no desire to dwell elsewhere."

"Not even in a palace?" asked the Princess.

"Such a thought has never entered my head. A palace is no place for me."

"A discreet reply," said the Princess, smiling approvingly. "But suppose I were to make you one of my handmaidens?"

Editha looked at the Prioress, not knowing exactly what answer she ought to give.

"Be not afraid to speak, daughter," said the Lady Isabel.

"I have taken a fancy to you, child," pursued the Princess, "and I should like to have you near me."

"I am deeply beholden to your Grace," replied Editha. "But I am so happy in the priory, that I should be loth to quit it. All the Sisters are kind to me; but kindest of all is our holy Prioress, and I should be ungrateful, indeed, if I could leave her."

"Heaven forbid I should tempt you, child," cried the Princess. "Think no more of what I said. I am glad to find you are so warmly attached to the good Prioress, who well deserves your love."

"Our Lady Superior has often spoken to me of your Grace," said Editha, "and has held you up to me as a model of piety and goodness."

"Nay, you must not learn to flatter, child," observed the Princess.

"I have told you, daughter, that the Princess is most anxious to redress the grievances of the people."

"That I am," said the Princess. "Do the people of Dartford complain?" she added, to Editha.

"They do more than complain, your Grace," was the reply—"they threaten; and I fear if something be not done speedily to tranquillize them, they will rise in revolt."

The Princess and the Lady Isabel exchanged glances.

"A few villagers cannot rise in revolt, child," remarked the Princess.

"The rising will not be confined to Dartford, gracious madam; but will extend to the whole country, which is in a most disturbed state, owing to the preaching of Friar John Ball. He is now in prison, but his

discourses are repeated by others, coupled with denunciations of vengeance."

"Vengeance against whom?" demanded the Princess.

"Against the nobles, your Grace," replied Editha.

"Has the King been threatened?"

"No, madam; but threats are frequently uttered against his ministers."

"And such seditious talk is tolerated here?"

"Not tolerated, gracious madam; but it cannot be repressed. The peasantry are deeply discontented, and keep little guard upon their tongues. Could your Grace behold their sullen countenances when they assemble to discuss their wrongs, as they term them, or listen to their murmurs against their oppressors, as they designate the nobles, you would think that such signs of danger ought not to be neglected."

"They shall not be neglected," remarked the Princess.

"I feel I am presumptuous in speaking thus," added Editha. "But my zeal must plead my excuse."

"You have spoken well," rejoined the Princess; "and I thank you."

Then taking a small tablet of lapis lazuli, garnished with precious stones, from her *gipciere*, she graciously bestowed it upon the damsel.

"As coming from your Grace, I shall ever prize the gift," cried Editha, in accents of the liveliest gratitude, and pressing the tablet to her heart as she spoke.

The Princess then announced to the Lady Isabel that she was about to depart.

"I would fain tarry longer with you, holy mother," she said, "and profit by your discourse. But time presses. After hearing mass at St. Edmond's Chapel, I shall proceed on my pilgrimage to Canterbury."

"All good saints watch over your Grace!" exclaimed the Prioress, fervently. "And may holy St. Thomas listen to your supplications, and grant your prayers!"

Summoned by the bell, Sister Eudoxia appeared, and threw open the door of the locutory; and the Prioress, passing out with her royal visitor, conducted her through several passages to the entrance hall, where the nuns had assembled.

All was in readiness for the Princess's departure; her ladies were on horseback; her palfrey was waiting for her.

The Prioress attended her to the door, and tears involuntarily sprang to the saintly lady's eyes, as she bade her royal visitor farewell.

However, she quickly regained her self-possession, and her deportment became as rigid as heretofore, and her looks austere.

By this time the Princess had mounted her palfrey, and her parting look at the Lady

Isabel was full of significance, though the latter seemed not to heed it.

All was stir and bustle in the courtyard, and the noise and confusion continued until the whole of the brilliant cavalcade had ridden forth from the gateway.

The Prioress remained to the last moment. At this juncture, Editha, who was standing behind her with Sister Eudoxia, watching the Princess's departure, preferred a request —or, rather, Sister Eudoxia preferred it for her.

"Holy mother," she said, "have I your permission to take Editha to St. Edmond's Chapel?"

Consent was readily given, and the young damsel and the elderly nun at once set out.

VIII.

OF THE ROUGH RESPONSE MADE TO SIR JOHN HOLLAND BY THE SMITH.

MEANWHILE, the cavalcade proceeded slowly on its way, followed by the villagers, who had been lingering outside the priory during the Princess's halt there.

As the splendid train approached the green, the throng increased; little groups being collected at intervals on either side of the road.

But though much curiosity was evinced to see the young King's mother, and the Court damsels in their rich attire, the male portion of the lookers-on raised no shouts, and some of them even refused to doff their caps.

Their sullen and disrespectful demeanour could not fail to strike the Princess, and confirmed what she had just heard.

Attended by two or three young nobles, Sir John Holland rode a little in advance of the *cortége*, and both he and his companions cast scornful glances at the spectators, which were well calculated to irritate them in their present mood.

On reaching the skirts of the green, the haughty young noble passed near a stalwart personage, whose garb proclaimed him to be a smith, and who stood there with his arms folded upon his broad chest, watching the procession.

The sullen expression of this man's countenance, and the manner in which he returned Sir John's haughty glance, provoked the young noble so much that he reined in his jennet, and called out—

"Who art thou, fellow, that thou darest knit thy brows at me?"

"I am Wat Tyler, the smith, of Dartford!" replied the other, in a bold voice, but without in any way altering his deportment.

"Doff thy bonnet, thou saucy knave!" cried Sir Osbert Montacute, one of Sir John's companions. "Know'st thou to whom thou art speaking?"

"I have been speaking to the King's half-brother," replied Wat Tyler, resolutely; "but I owe him no homage!"

"Thou shalt owe him a lesson in courtesy, thou rude churl!" cried Sir John, raising his riding-whip to strike him.

But ere the whip touched his shoulders, the smith seized it and flung it to the ground.

This daring act would have been punished by Sir John's companions if a young damsel, who was crossing the green at the moment with an elderly nun, and saw what was

occurring, had not flown to the spot, and interposed between the smith and the young nobles.

At the same time, three or four men, arrayed like minstrels, sprang forward.

"Fear nothing, Wat; we are with you!" cried a voice.

"Begone, child!" said the smith, to his daughter; "you are in the way. If any one touches me, he will rue it!"

And drawing his dagger, he stood upon his defence.

"No; I will not leave you, father," cried Editha. "Come with me, I beseech you!"

"Hold!" exclaimed Sir John Holland, who saw that a serious disturbance was likely to ensue. "Here comes our lady mother."

The Princess was now close at hand, her attention having been called to the affair by Sister Eudoxia.

At her approach the young nobles drew back, and Sir John Holland appeared somewhat disconcerted by the severe look she threw at him.

"This disturbance is most inopportune," she said, in a tone of rebuke, to her son.

"'Tis not my fault," he rejoined. "The knave was insolent, and deserved more punishment than he has received."

"You have done wrong, I tell you; this is not the moment to quarrel with the common people, but to conciliate them."

"You are best able to perform that task yourself, madam," muttered her son. "Had you not been here, the knave would not have been alive to mock us as he doth now."

"No more, I command you," said his mother.

Then, addressing Editha, who was still standing before her father, she said, in a very gracious tone—

"I did not expect to see you again so soon, fair maiden. I thought I had left you at the priory."

"I was hastening to St. Edmond's Chapel, your Grace, when——"

"No matter," interrupted the Princess; "'tis over now. This is your father, I presume?" she added, with a kindly look at Wat, that quickly banished the cloud from his brow.

Long before this, he had restored the dagger to his girdle.

"Father, the Princess speaks to you," said Editha, plucking his sleeve.

Thus exhorted, Wat removed his cap, and made an obeisance such as he had not rendered to any one for many a day.

The Princess now smiled very graciously indeed; as did also Editha, for she was well pleased with her father's ready assent.

Addressing Wat Tyler, but, at the same

time, taking care that her words should reach the ears of the other bystanders, all of whom had uncovered and observed a respectful demeanour, the Princess said—

"As you are aware, I am performing a pilgrimage to Canterbury, and it would grieve me if any untoward circumstance should occur during my journey, so as to interrupt my devotional thoughts. I have learnt, from your good Prioress, with whom I have just been conversing, that some discontent prevails among the inhabitants of this village. I am sorry to hear it. But rest assured that, on my return, I will speak to the King, my son; and I doubt not, if it be practicable, he will redress your grievances."

While the Princess was thus speaking, the crowd had greatly increased, and her words and gracious manners produced a marked effect upon the assemblage.

But positive enthusiasm was excited when she took her purse from her girdle, and, giving it to an attendant, bade him distribute its contents amid the throng.

As a scramble took place for the gold pieces, loud shouts arose of "Long live the Princess of Wales!" and blessings were heaped upon her head.

His mother's treatment of the audacious smith, which he regarded as a reproof to himself, was exceedingly mortifying to Sir John Holland, and might have drawn some angry remarks from him, had he not been attracted by Editha, whose beauty greatly impressed him.

He called Sir Osbert Montacute's attention to her, declaring he had never seen any one so lovely.

"She much surpasses all our Court damsels," he exclaimed. "No one can compare with her."

"I cannot go quite so far as that, my lord," replied Sir Osbert, laughing. "But, for a country maiden, I own she is passing fair."

"There is nothing rustic about her," said Sir John. "She looks like one of Diana's nymphs."

"Or a vestal?" suggested the other.

"Ay, a vestal. She is purity itself, I'll be sworn."

"Then you must not gaze at her so ardently, my lord, or you will trouble her. See! she casts down her eyes, and blushes deeply."

"The blush heightens her beauty. By heaven, she shall be mine! 'Twill serve her churlish father right to rob him of his daughter."

"Beware, my lord, what you do! She must belong to the priory. One of the sisterhood has just joined her."

"That will not deter me," returned Sir John. "But an opportunity of speaking with her presents itself. My mother has just called her."

With this, he pushed forward, and addressed a few gallant remarks to the young damsel, who was thanking the Princess for her generosity.

Evidently alarmed, Editha made no answer, but, as soon as she could do so with propriety, returned to Sister Eudoxia and her father.

Even then Sir John did not desist, and regardless of the stern glances cast upon him by the smith, he followed Editha as she moved away, and continued to address her with even greater freedom than before.

"A truce to this, I pray you, my lord!" cried Wat Tyler. "My daughter is not accustomed to courtly compliments, neither are they agreeable to me."

"I care little whether thou art pleased or

not, fellow," rejoined the haughty young noble. "I am not paying compliments to thy daughter, but telling her the truth. Her beauty ought not to be hidden at Dartford, and it were a positive crime to shut her up in a convent."

"Come away, Editha," cried Sister Eudoxia. "Your ears must not be defiled by this unrestrained talk."

"No; let her stay," said the smith. "She knows how to comport herself."

"Be not angry, father," whispered Editha; "I will exchange no word with him."

Failing to extract a word from her, or even a smile, Sir John at length departed, saying, as he bade adieu, "When we meet again, fair damsel, I trust you will be less obdurate."

Bounding off on his impatient jennet, he resumed his place at the head of the cavalcade, which was already in motion.

IX.

ST. EDMOND'S CHAPEL.

THE bulk of the assemblage followed the *cortége* to St. Edmond's Chapel, which, as the reader is aware, was situated at the further end of the village, and not far from the church.

Wat Tyler thought his daughter had best go home; but as she wished to attend mass, and Sister Eudoxia undertook to take charge of her, he allowed her to proceed.

"After all," he said, "there is nothing to fear. This insolent noble will not dare molest thee in the chapel. I will go home, and tell thy mother what has happened. She will be uneasy."

Sister Eudoxia and Editha did not reach

the chapel till the Princess and her train had gone in; but though there was little room left, the nun and her charge were allowed to enter.

Completely filled by the splendidly-attired Court damsels and nobles, the little temple presented a superb appearance—additional effect being given to the scene by the lights on the altar, and the gorgeous tints thrown on the assemblage from the painted windows. The atmosphere was heavy with incense.

Mass had begun, and the Princess was kneeling at the altar.

No place being vacant near the door, Sister Eudoxia and Editha were obliged to move on till they reached the foremost ranks, where they were enabled to kneel down.

What was the young damsel's fright when she found she had inadvertently

placed herself next the very person she was most desirous to avoid.

She did not raise her eyes, but she felt his ardent gaze was fixed on her, and her mind became so disturbed, that all devotional feelings were banished, and had retreat been possible, she would have quitted the chapel.

Her close proximity to her dreaded neighbour caused a tremor to run through her frame, and she shrank from his slightest contact.

Moreover, a strange terror seized her that he was in some way mixed up with her destiny, and that she should not be able to escape from him if she fell into his toils.

While she was endeavouring to shake off this painful idea, a low voice breathed in her ear, "You are mine!"

She knew who had spoken, and her terror increased.

Shortly afterwards the solemn service ended, and the courtly throng began to quit the chapel.

Fearful of encountering her dreaded neighbour's glance, she did not look up till she felt sure he was gone.

When she arose, the Princess was bending reverently to the altar before taking her departure, and allowing her to pass by, she followed slowly after with Sister Eudoxia.

The Princess had noticed her, and, on reaching the porch, summoned her, and said, with a gracious smile—

"Remember what I have told you. Should you require my aid at any time, fail not to come to me. Adieu!"

Assisted by her grooms and pages, who were standing by, the royal lady then mounted her palfrey and rode off; but she was instantly succeeded by Sir John Holland, who had lingered with Sir Osbert

Montacute to have a last look at the fair damsel who had bewitched him.

Curbing his fiery jennet as he passed the porch, he looked fixedly at Editha; but she cast down her eyes, and, provoked by her coldness, he rode on.

Amid the shouts and blessings of the villagers, the Princess then crossed the little bridge over the Darent, and, attended by her retinue and escort, mounted the hill on the road to Rochester and Canterbury.

X.

THE LOMBARD MERCHANT.

SOMEWHAT retarded by the important event described, the sports now commenced on the green, and were carried on merrily enough, the villagers being in high good humour owing to the Princess's liberality. For the time, their grievances were forgotten.

There was dancing round the Maypole to the blithe strains of the minstrels, mumming, wrestling, and trials of skill with the quarter-staff, resulting in several broken pates. Moreover, there was much drinking of Whitsun ale.

Towards evening a large party of travellers from London arrived at the "Bull,"

and having secured lodgings for the night at that comfortable and roomy hostel, took part in the village festivities.

Among the new-comers was a grave-looking man, in a long gown and furred velvet cap. His dark complexion, aquiline nose, quick black eyes, and beetling brows, together with a foreign accent, showed that he was not an Englishman, though he spoke the language well.

Jacopo Benedetto del Treviso—for so was he named, from the city of his birth—belonged to a company of wealthy Lombard merchants at that time established in London, who lent money on usance, like the Jews, and were looked upon to be as great extortioners as the Israelites themselves by those who borrowed from them.

This enterprising company had recently farmed the Government taxes, and collected

them with great rigour, as we have previously mentioned.

One of the richest members of the company, Messer Benedetto, exercised considerable influence over its councils. Indeed, it was he who had proposed the farming of the King's taxes, by which it was expected that a large sum would be realized.

Messer Benedetto lived luxuriously at his house in Lombard Street, but he was careful not to make any display when he travelled; neither did he carry much gold about him, so that if he were robbed his losses would be inconsiderable.

However, he had never yet been robbed, for he always contrived to join some strong party whom marauders, such as Jack Straw, did not venture to attack.

On the present occasion he had started early in the morning from the "Tabard" at Southwark, where a rendezvous of travellers

bound for Rochester and Canterbury was generally held. The muster was quite strong enough to insure safety.

As will be conjectured, Messer Benedetto had some business on hand. At Dartford he expected to meet a tax-collector named Humphrey Shaxton, and he found him awaiting his arrival at the "Bull."

This Shaxton had previously been employed by the Government, and his roughness in the discharge of his obnoxious office recommended him to Benedetto.

Rude and brutal with the lower orders, Shaxton was fawning and obsequious to those of higher degree. His coarse, repulsive physiognomy indicated his nature. Red-haired and flat-nosed, he had a long upper lip and heavy chin.

Heretofore, Shaxton had worn the royal livery; but this he had now laid aside, and was habited in a dark serge tunic, with an

inkhorn at his girdle, and a parchment account-book hanging beside it.

His red locks were covered by a felt cap, turned up only at the back, and having a long, projecting point.

Immediately after his arrival, Messer Benedetto had a long conference in private with the collector, and learnt that a good deal of resistance to his demands of three groats a head had been made by the peasantry.

Small as the tax appeared, they were very reluctant to pay it; but Shaxton declared he would allow none to escape—youths or maidens—unless he was satisfied they were under the appointed age of fifteen.

"According to their own showing, they are all under age," he said; "but they can't deceive me," he added, with a coarse grin. "When I demand it, the poll-tax must be

forthcoming. Already, I have got a good sum, as your worship will find when I make up my accounts."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Benedetto. "Have you begun to make a collection here at Dartford?"

"Not yet, worshipful sir," said Shaxton. "I must look about me, and make inquiries before setting to work. It saves time and trouble. I am told the villagers are very angry with the tax, and some of them declare they wont pay it. We shall see. There is a smith here, named Wat Tyler—an obstinate churl—who incites the people to resistance. He has a very pretty daughter, who looks sixteen or seventeen, though some say she is younger—under age, in fact. But I am determined he shall pay the tax for her, if only to plague him."

"Right. 'Tis best to put down such mischievous knaves," observed Benedetto. "Begin with this smith."

"I have placed him first on my list, as your worship will observe," rejoined the tax-collector, opening his book.

"Has he other children liable to the impost?" asked the merchant.

"No; he has only this daughter," replied Shaxton. "I would he had a dozen—he should pay for them all. Most of the villagers are now assembled on the green, with their wives and families. If your worship will be pleased to step forth, you will see them, and may be able to form an estimate of their numbers, and the probable amount of impost they will yield."

"Come, then!" cried Benedetto.

And, followed respectfully by the tax-collector, he went forth to survey the festive scene.

XI.

THE TAX-COLLECTOR.

THE merriment was then at its height on the green. Youths and maidens were disporting themselves; various pastimes were going on; and, judging from the shouts and laughter, everybody seemed to be happy.

The only person who appeared out of place amid such a joyous scene was the tax-collector. Luckily, very few of the concourse were aware of his ill-omened presence; so he did not disturb the general enjoyment.

A large circle, some four or five feet deep, was formed round the May-pole, and through this ring our Lombard merchant contrived to penetrate, and was thus enabled to see

the dancers, who were hidden by the throng.

Several of the damsels were comely, and he was particularly struck by the well-formed limbs of one of them. This was Marjory, the milkmaid, whom Editha had met earlier in the day; and though the active damsel had now been bounding round the May-pole for nearly an hour, with very little intermission, she did not appear half so much fatigued as the swain next her.

If her object was to tire out this poor youth, Marjory completely succeeded; for soon afterwards he was fain to give in, and she then relinquished the rope of flowers which she had held so long, and retired with him, flushed and panting, amid the cheers and laughter of the bystanders.

Messer Benedetto withdrew at the same time, having seen enough of the dancing, and looked round for Shaxton, whom he had left outside the ring.

He did not see him; but his eye alighted on a sturdy individual, in the garb of a smith, standing at a little distance with a comely dame, and a young damsel beside him.

It instantly occurred to the Lombard merchant that this person must be Wat Tyler of whom the tax-collector had spoken, and he therefore regarded him with a certain curiosity; but his attention was quickly diverted from the smith to the young damsel with him, and he was gazing at her with surprise and admiration, when Shaxton came up.

After a word with his employer, the tax-collector strode towards the smith, and, in a loud and insolent voice, demanded his name.

"What is it to thee how I am called?" rejoined the other, sternly.

"Much," said Shaxton. "In virtue of mine office I am empowered to interrogate

any man I think proper, and I again demand thy name and calling. Thou wilt incur a penalty an' thou refusest to answer."

"Wat Tyler is my husband's name," interposed the dame, fearing some disturbance might occur. "He is a smith and armourer."

"Tut, wife!" cried Wat. "He knows who I am well enough. Now, about thy business, fellow?"

"I have not yet done," said Shaxton, pertinaciously. "This maiden is thy daughter?"

Wat's patience was nearly exhausted, and he was also enraged by the bold, offensive stare with which the tax-collector regarded Editha.

"Ay, ay; she is our child," again interposed Dame Tyler.

"Child!" exclaimed Shaxton. "By St. Blaise! she is ripening into womanhood."

"Thou hadst best begone!" cried Wat Tyler, with a look so fierce and menacing, that the tax-collector deemed it prudent not to provoke him further, more especially as several persons had gathered round the smith, and seemed disposed to take part with him.

He therefore contented himself with saying, "Thou shalt hear more from me on the morrow," and marched away.

XII.

MARK CLEAVER, ELIAS LIRIPIPE, AND JOSBERT GROUTHEAD.

AS Shaxton departed, Messer Benedetto came up, and said, in a bland half-apologetic voice to Editha, "I trust the man has not been rude to you, fair damsel?"

Editha scarce made any reply, being unwilling to enter into conversation with a stranger, whose manner, though courteous, was somewhat forward; but her father said, bluntly, "You should teach your servant better manners, sir."

"My servant!" exclaimed Benedetto.

"Ay; or your factor, or whatever you call him," said the smith. "Unless I am

much mistaken, you are one of the Lombard merchants who have farmed the poll-tax, and this insolent fellow is your collector."

Astounded at being addressed in this manner, Benedetto glanced at the speaker, but his eye sunk beneath the smith's steady gaze.

"Art sure this is one of the Lombard merchants, Wat?" asked a bystander, noticeable for his round, rosy visage.

"As sure as I am that thou art an honest butcher, Mark Cleaver," replied Wat Tyler. "Let him deny it if he can. 'Tis to him and his brethren, and not to the King and the Government, that we now pay taxes. Why should we Englishmen allow ourselves to be despoiled by usurious foreigners?"

"Ay, wherefore?" cried several angry voices.

"If you will listen to reason, my good friends," said Benedetto, in a calm, per-

suasive tone, "I will show that you are not unjustly treated by us. We did not impose the taxes of which you complain."

"But the Government did not dare to collect the taxes, or they would not have sold them to you," interrupted Wat Tyler.

"The Government wanted the money immediately, and we advanced it," said the merchant. "You cannot in fairness expect us to be losers by the transaction."

"You hope to be large gainers by it, I doubt not," said Wat; "but I think you will find yourselves out in your reckoning. 'Twas a wrongful bargain, and ought never to have been made!"

"Blame not us, good friends, but the Government that made it," said Benedetto, still in the same calm voice. "If the poll-tax presses hardly upon you, as it may in some cases, you should call upon the ministers to refund the money we have paid them."

"You are jesting with us, master," said Mark Cleaver. "I should like to see the ministers refund money."

"We have been bought and sold—that is quite clear," said another bystander, a little man in a grey woollen jerkin and a tall, conical cap. "But these Lombard merchants and the ministers will both rue their bargain."

"Thou art a brave man for a tailor, Elias Liripipe," observed Wat Tyler. "Wilt thou clip off this caitiff tax-collector's ears?"

"Ay, marry will I—with my shears," replied Liripipe, suiting the action to the word.

"He shall fare worse if he comes to me," cried Josbert Grouthead, the cheesemonger. "I will him cut in twain as I would a Cheddar cheese."

"And eat him afterwards," observed

Benedetto, drily. "Methinks you grumble more than is needful. After all, three groats a head is not much. Were beauty taxable," he added, to Editha, "your father ought to pay twenty nobles for you. The King hath no fairer damsel in his dominions. 'Tis true, by St. Anthony, gainsay me who will!"

"Nay, we will none of us gainsay you," said Liripipe, who, like his companions, was somewhat appeased by the merchant's manner; "we are all agreed as to Editha's beauty."

Satisfied with the favourable impression he had produced, Messer Benedetto walked off towards another part of the green.

Wat Tyler looked after him, and observed to Liripipe—

"Thou art right, gossip; these Lombard merchants will rue their bargain."

XIII.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER.

MEANTIME another traveller had arrived at the "Bull."

He had come from Canterbury, and as he had ridden across Dartford Heath, it was wonderful that he had met with no molestation from the Outlaw and his band.

In age, this traveller was between fifty and sixty; but he was still active and full of vigour, and had a striking and highly intellectual countenance, grave in expression, and lighted up by fine dark eyes.

The face was a perfect oval, the nose being somewhat pronounced, but handsomely formed. His dark, forked beard was still

unmixed with grey, as were his locks. His frame was tall, spare, but remarkably well proportioned.

He wore a dark velvet tunic, over which was a loose gown, and his coif was encircled by a roll of stuff like a turban, which gave effect to his physiognomy. From his girdle hung a pouch, and he had a short sword by his side. He wore boots of supple leather, but not with the long-pointed toes previously described.

As the traveller rode up to the inn, Urban Baldock, the host, a stout, good-humoured personage, came forth to greet him.

"Your worship is welcome to Dartford," he said. "Will it please you to alight?"

"Canst thou give me a lodging, Baldock?" inquired the traveller.

"Ah, marry can I!" replied the host. "The house is full; for a large party has just arrived from the 'Tabard,' at South-

wark; but your worship shall not want a lodging, even if I give up my own chamber."

"Gramercy, good host!" replied the other, "I would not have thee put to inconvenience on my account."

"Nay, the inconvenience is nothing," said Baldock. "'Twould be a reproach to me if I did not find accommodation for the renowned Geoffrey Chaucer, of whom, as a poet, all England is justly proud."

"Though thou hast not been at Court, thou has learned the art of flattery, I find, Baldock," said Chaucer, smiling, for he was not displeased by this tribute paid to his reputation. "But thou say'st thine house is full. Whom hast thou with thee?"

"They are mostly strangers," replied the host, "and I have not yet learnt their names. But I will inform myself anon. One of them is yonder on the green. You may discern him amid the crowd."

"I see him," observed Chaucer, looking in the direction indicated. "'Tis Messer Benedetto, the great Lombard merchant. I'll be sworn he has come here to look after the collection of the poll-tax, which he and his partners have farmed."

"No doubt your worship is in the right. There is a rascally tax-collector in the house. Would to heaven we were rid of him! for I fear he may breed some disturbance in the village."

With the host's assistance, Chaucer then dismounted; and having seen his horse taken to the stable and well cared for, he followed Baldock to the principal guest-chamber.

It was a comfortable room, with a very low ceiling, supported by great beams. The panels were of oak, and the furniture—tables, chairs, and benches—were also of oak. The bay windows were open, and looked upon the green.

There were no guests in the room; and the seats outside the house were deserted. All were watching the sports.

A good deal of noise arose from merry-makers; but the poet did not find it disagreeable, and declined to have the windows shut.

"What will your worship please to take for supper?" inquired the host. "I have a cold capon, and a cold ham, and a famous cold pasty; and I can fry you some noble crimson trout from the Darent, or silver eels, as you may like best, and I can add a dish of rare cray-fish, from the Cray."

"Give me the trout and the capon," replied Chaucer. "And, hark ye, while you are preparing supper, bring me a flask of red Gascoigne wine and a manchet."

The host then disappeared, and the poet, left alone, leaned partly out of the window, to survey the pleasant scene.

And now a word about him.

Born in London in 1328, Geoffrey Chaucer, at the period of our story, was fifty-four; but, as we have already shown, he carried his years bravely. He was said to be of noble extraction; and it can, at least, be declared of him with certainty that he looked well born.

Since the Conquest, all the poetry of the country had been written in Norman-French, then the dominant language; but while he was a student at Cambridge, and not more than eighteen, Chaucer made his first essay with an English poem, which, from its novelty, as well as from its beauty, obtained an immense success, and won for him the proud title he has ever since borne of "The Father of English Poetry."

Subsequently, Chaucer became a page at the Court of Edward III., and was speedily taken into favour by that monarch's second

son, John of Gaunt, the ambitious Duke of Lancaster. It was at this time that Chaucer wedded Philippa, sister of the Lady Catherine Swynford, to whom the Duke of Lancaster was secretly attached, and whom he ultimately married.

During all this period the poet had been adding to his laurels. Appointed envoy to the republic of Genoa, he had an opportunity of visiting Petrarch; and on his return from this embassy, and from a mission to Charles V. of France, he received the lucrative appointment of Controller of the Customs. A butt of sack was not bestowed upon him, as on Poets-Laureate in after-days, but a goblet of wine was brought him each day by the King's cup-bearer.

Chaucer next followed Edward into France, and was present at the unsuccessful siege of Rheims. Influenced by the example of the Duke of Lancaster, with whom he was now

connected by marriage, the poet embraced the doctrines of Wycliffe, and thereby incurred the enmity of the clergy and their partisans.

On the accession of Richard II., so long as the Duke of Lancaster swayed his royal nephew's councils, Chaucer was in high favour at Court; but as the Duke's influence declined, the poet was neglected, and he had retired in disgust shortly before his introduction to the reader.

Amid his varied occupations—embassies, conflicts with the clergy, and political intrigues—Chaucer had found time to produce several most exquisite poems; but his greatest achievement, "The Canterbury Tales," which raised him to the highest pinnacle of fame, and has maintained him there ever since, was not accomplished till some years later.

While the poet was gazing through the

window, charmed by the beauty of the evening, amused by the scene, and allowing various fancies to flit through his mind, he became aware of a young damsel, who was passing across the green sufficiently near to enable him to judge of her beauty.

So lovely, so graceful was she, that his eyes followed her as she moved along, and he almost refused to believe that the middle-aged dame who accompanied her, and evidently belonged to the lower class, could be her mother.

But as the host appeared at the moment with the manchet and wine, he questioned him, and learnt, to his infinite surprise, that the fair damsel was the daughter of Wat Tyler, the smith.

"How so rough a fellow came to have a daughter so fair and gentle puzzles me, but so it is," said Baldock. "The villagers think so highly of Editha's beauty,

that they call her the Fair Maid of Kent."

"And she deserves the appellation," observed Chaucer.

"She is now going to the priory," pursued the host. "She attends matins and vespers each day. Lady Isabel, the Prioress, takes much notice of her."

"The fair damsel brings to mind her own youth and beauty, no doubt," said Chaucer. "Lovelier creature was never seen than the Lady Isabel Caversham. I well remember her. She had many lovers, and amongst them was one noble knight whom she preferred to all the rest. But he proved false, forswore her to wed another, and she buried herself in this nunnery."

"I have heard something of the story before," remarked Baldock. "But the scandalous gossips hinted at the time that the noble knight you mention had deeply betrayed her."

"Believe not the tale, good host," said Chaucer.

"Nay; it has long since been forgotten, I trust," rejoined Baldock. "Any faults the Prioress may have committed have been expiated, I make no doubt, by severe penance. She is worn to a skeleton by constant mortification of the flesh. The Princess of Wales, who is performing a pilgrimage to Canterbury, has been here to-day, and paid the holy mother a visit."

"I met the Princess and her train near Rochester," said Chaucer. "But I had no converse with her Grace. I am curious to have another look at the smith's fair daughter, in whom, as you say, the good Prioress takes so much interest."

"Nay; if your worship desires it, that can be readily accomplished," replied Baldock. "You have but to walk towards the priory,

and you will meet her returning from vespers."

While this discourse was going on, Chaucer had eaten a few mouthfuls of bread, and drank a cup of wine.

He now rose, and bidding the host keep back supper for an hour, went forth, and proceeded to the priory.

XIV.

SEDITIOUS TALK BENEATH THE OAK.

CHAUCER'S noble countenance and gravity of manner inspired respect, and caps were doffed as he passed through the concourse on the green; but no one ventured to address him except one stalwart individual, who separated himself from the throng, and strode towards him.

The poet stopped, and courteously awaited the man's approach.

"Master Geoffrey Chaucer will scarcely recollect me," said the burly fellow, doffing his cap; "but I well remember seeing him when he was in France with the late King and the Duke of Lancaster. I was then

an archer in the train of Sir Eustace de Valletort."

"Ha! I mind thee well! Thou wert the stoutest archer Sir Eustace had; but I cannot recollect thy name."

"I am called Wat Tyler, and am now a smith in this village," replied the other.

"Wat Tyler, say'st thou?" exclaimed Chaucer, regarding him in surprise. "How long hast thou dwelt here?"

"Nigh sixteen years," replied Wat.

"Then thou wert here before the Lady Isabel retired to the nunnery?"

"I had married, and had set up as a smith about a twelvemonth before that event," said Wat.

"I thought so," mentally ejaculated Chaucer.

He then added aloud, "Had thy lord fulfilled his vow, the Lady Isabel might now adorn a Court, instead of wearing away her

life in a cloister. Nor do I think Sir Eustace is happy."

"Mayhap his conscience afflicts him," observed Wat.

A momentary silence ensued, which was broken by Chaucer.

"Just now," he said, "as I was gazing from the window of the inn, mine eyes were greeted by a vision of exceeding beauty. 'Twas not a fairy, nor a nymph, that I beheld, but a young damsel; and I was told by the host that she was the daughter of Wat Tyler, the smith."

"My daughter!" exclaimed Wat. "You greatly overrate her beauty, worshipful sir."

"Not a whit. 'Tis true I caught only a momentary glimpse of her, but she appeared to me the fairest maiden mine eyes ever lighted on. However, I must needs see her again, to make sure."

"Editha is gone to vespers at the priory,

or I would beg you to step into my cottage. She would esteem it a great honour to converse with the famous Master Geoffrey Chaucer."

"Walk with me towards the priory. Perchance we may meet her," said Chaucer.

As they went on together, the conversation dropped, and the poet seemed occupied by his reflections.

From time to time Wat Tyler stole a glance at him, but did not make a remark.

They had now quitted the village, and entered an avenue leading to the priory. Halting beneath a fine old oak, which threw its mighty branches across the road, Chaucer said to his companion, "Art thou a Wycliffite?"

"Truly am I," replied Wat. "I am a friend of the Franciscan friar, John Ball, who is now imprisoned for preaching Wycliffe's doctrines."

"I saw John Ball while I was at Canterbury, and he spoke to me obscurely, as if he believed a religious insurrection to be at hand."

"If an insurrection takes place, it will not be merely against the clergy," said Wat. "Before the abuses of the Church are reformed, the grievances of the people must be redressed."

"The ecclesiastical hierarchy must be abolished," said Chaucer.

"Serfdom destroyed, and property equally divided amongst all," added Wat.

"Nay, I cannot go so far with thee as that," rejoined Chaucer. "And be not led away by idle talk. Property never will be in common. Thus much I can tell thee, and thou mayst repeat it to thy fellows, if thou wilt: had not the Duke of Lancaster been thwarted—ay, constantly thwarted—in his plans for the people's benefit, most of

their grievances would by this time have been remedied."

"I can easily understand why you should endeavour to justify the Duke of Lancaster, sir," rejoined Wat Tyler, boldly. "But his Grace has lost the people's confidence, and will never regain it."

"How?—never regain it?" cried Chaucer.

"He is known to be ambitious, and they think he aims at the Crown. I must speak plainly," rejoined Wat. "The people will not help him to dethrone his nephew—son of the Black Prince."

"He does not need their aid for any such rebellious design!" said Chaucer, in a tone of stern rebuke. "Great wrong is done him by the foul suspicion. The Duke is the firmest supporter of the Throne."

"But is he not mistrusted by his royal nephew—greatly mistrusted?" observed Wat Tyler.

"The Duke hath many enemies, avowed and secret, and I know not what false assertions concerning him may have been made by the latter to the King; but this I wot well, Richard hath not a more loyal and devoted subject than his uncle, John of Gaunt."

"Loyal the Duke may be; but 'tis certain he is aspiring, and the people like him not."

"Would they like any Prince?" demanded Chaucer, sceptically. "Would they follow any leader but one of themselves?"

"Time will show," rejoined Wat Tyler, with a feeling of self-exultation.

"Thou thinkst we are on the eve of an insurrection—eh?" cried Chaucer, fixing a searching look upon him.

"Nay, I say not that," rejoined the other; "but I affirm that the people are resolved to obtain a hearing."

"And I tell thee again there is no one

who can obtain a hearing for them, unless it be the Duke of Lancaster."

Wat Tyler shook his head.

"They fear lest they should be betrayed," he said. "They think the Duke will use them for his own purpose; and that gained, will sacrifice them."

"The rising will be instantly crushed without his support," cried Chaucer.

"I do not think so," rejoined Wat Tyler.

All this time there had been a secret listener to their discourse.

Behind a neighbouring tree was ensconced the tax-collector, who had followed them cautiously from the green.

Not a word uttered by either speaker had escaped Shaxton's quick ears. Having now heard enough, he prepared to decamp.

"'Twas lucky I followed them," he thought. "I have learnt a most important secret, which I can turn to profit, by reveal-

ing it to the Council. Evidently an insurrection of the people is about to burst forth. Wat Tyler is concerned in it, and Master Geoffrey Chaucer is now privy to it; if, indeed, he be not, as I suspect, one of the chief contrivers. Both must be arrested. I will consult with Messer Benedetto. No; that were unwise—as, if he takes the matter in hand, I shall lose the reward. I must proceed cautiously. What if I were to send a message to the Lord Mayor, and Sir John Philpot! I will do it, if I can find a trusty messenger. But—hist! I hear footsteps! Some one comes this way, I must be gone."

With this he stole noiselessly away, entirely escaping the notice of the two persons in his vicinity.

XV.

WHAT PASSED BETWEEN CHAUCER AND EDITHA.

THE footsteps that had alarmed the spy were those of Editha and her mother, who were returning from the priory.

Wat Tyler pointed them out to the poet, but Chaucer did not require to be told who they were, for he instantly recognised the fair young damsel.

The pair quickened their pace as soon as they descried the smith, and presently came up. But they stopped at a short distance till called forward.

Chaucer did not embarrass the young damsel by regarding her too steadfastly; but, nevertheless, his gaze threw her into

some confusion, and covered her fair cheek with blushes.

Whatever inference he drew from this rapid but close inspection of her features, he allowed no sign to escape him.

"This is Master Geoffrey Chaucer, child," said Wat Tyler, in a low tone, to his daughter.

The mention of that name operated like magic on Editha, and seemed instantly to dispel her timidity.

Raising her eyes, she gazed at the poet with mingled reverence and admiration.

"By St. Anselm! she is very like the Lady Isabel," thought Chaucer.

"Pardon my boldness," cried Editha; "I did not think I should ever behold Master Geoffrey Chaucer, and I cannot repress my delight at seeing him. Till now I thought he could be no mortal man!"

"Then, I fear, you must be grievously disappointed," observed Chaucer.

"Disappointed!—no! I have hitherto regarded you as a superior being, whom I should not dare to address."

"But you have no such feeling now, I trust?" he said.

"No," she replied; "you look so good-natured that I will venture to tell you that I have read 'The Court of Love,' and 'Troilus and Cressida,' and will try to express the pleasure those poems have given me."

"My daughter is never tired of reading your poems, worshipful sir," observed Dame Tyler.

"They afford me fresh delight every time I turn to them," cried Editha.

"I did not anticipate this gratification," remarked Chaucer. "Many compliments have been paid me, many flattering things have been said to me by Court dames, but none that have pleased me so much as you

simple praise, for I am willing to believe it the language of truth."

"It is so," cried Editha, earnestly.

Wat Tyler forbore to take any part in this conversation, but he listened to it well pleased, and when a proposal was made by Chaucer to return with the party to the village, the smith fell back with his wife, and allowed the poet and Editha to precede them.

Chaucer evidently took a lively interest in his young companion, which could not fail to gratify her, and she replied to all his questions with the most perfect candour and simplicity.

She told him of the constant kindnesses she had received from the good Prioress, and how warmly attached she was to her. At this he did not seem at all surprised, but he counselled her not to become a novice without due consideration.

Neither did he seem surprised when she told him of the notice that the Princess of Wales had taken of her that morning; but he said she was wrong not to accept the Princess's gracious offer of a place in her Highness' household.

He looked very grave, however, when informed of the annoyance she had experienced from Sir John Holland.

"I strongly commend your prudence," he said. "You treated the insolent young noble as he deserved, and I trust you may never behold him again."

"But his last words, whispered in St. Edmond's chantry, seemed to intimate that he meant not to desist from pursuing me," she said. "He terrifies me."

"If you have any real uneasiness, mention the matter to the Prioress, and she will advise you how to act."

"I have already done so, and she has

promised to send a message to the Princess of Wales."

"Then you may rest easy," he rejoined. "Your persecutor will trouble you no more."

XVI.

THE EREMITE.

THEY had now nearly reached the end of the avenue, when a friar was seen approaching from a side path.

His long, grey gown almost covered his bare feet, and his cowl was drawn over the back of his head. A cord was tied round his waist, and from this girdle hung a long string of beads. A white beard added to his venerable appearance.

"'Tis Friar Gawin, the eremite," observed Editha. "He is going from his cell to the priory."

"Where is the hermitage?" inquired Chaucer.

"Not far hence, in the wood," she rejoined. "I pray you to excuse me, sir. I think, from the holy father's manner, that he desires to speak to me."

Chaucer bowed, and walked slowly on; and by the time Wat Tyler and his wife had joined Editha, the hermit came up.

"Dominus vobiscum!" he exclaimed. "Ye are well met. I have something to say to thee, daughter," he added, to Editha, "but I cannot say it now. Prithee bring her to my cell this evening," he continued to Dame Tyler.

"Shall I do so?" said the dame, appealing to her husband.

"Ay, marry," he replied; "wherefore not?—the moon rises early."

"Come with them, an thou wilt, brother," said the hermit to Wat. "Thou canst wait outside my cell."

"Nay; I am not afraid!" rejoined the smith. "No one will molest them. As

soon as the moon hath risen—and that will be about the ninth hour—you may expect them, father."

"I shall not detain them long," replied the hermit. "I have not much to say—but it must be said to-night."

"I hope you mean not to reprove me for any fault I have committed, father?" said Editha.

"You will learn in good time, daughter," replied the hermit. "At the ninth hour I shall expect you. The taper burning in the window of my cell will guide you through the gloom. You need have no fear. There are no evil things near my abode. All good saints have you in their keeping!"

With this valediction, he pursued his way to the priory.

They did not overtake Chaucer till he had entered the village, and was close by the smith's habitation.

"I am now going to supper at the inn,"

he observed to Wat. "When I have finished my meal, I should like to see you again."

"I will be with your worship in an hour," replied the smith.

"Shall I tell you how I shall pass the time while you are at supper?" said Editha, playfully, to the poet.

"Profitably, I am sure," he replied. "Very likely in reading your mass-book."

"Of a sooth, I shall pass the time profitably," she replied, with an arch look. "But it will be in reading your 'Court of Love.'"

And, with a gay laugh, she retreated to her father's dwelling.

Chaucer watched her till she disappeared, and then went on to the hostel.

XVII.

MYSTERIOUS TRAVELLERS ARRIVE AT THE HOSTEL.

IN the principal room there were several guests, most of whom rose to return the poet's salutation as he entered.

A cover had been laid for him on a small table near the window, which was still left open, and to this pleasantly-placed table the host conducted him with some little ceremony, for Master Baldock was rather proud of his distinguished guest.

"I hope the trout may not be overdone," he said, in an apologetic tone; "for your worship hath stayed a little beyond your time, and the cook could not take them out

of the frying-pan. 'Twould be a thousand pities if they were, for finer fish never came out of the Darent."

He would have run on in this strain, had not Chaucer cut him short; and when the trout were placed before the poet, he pronounced them excellent.

"Never did I taste better fish," he said, as he swallowed a deep draught of the Gascoigne vintage.

Having begun thus satisfactorily, he continued his repast with deliberation.

The room, as we have said, was well-nigh filled with guests, some of whom were supping, while others were quaffing Gaillac or Osey out of tall drinking-cups.

But there was more company outside than within the room. The benches in front of the window at which Chaucer was seated were occupied by villagers, who had been enjoying the sports on the green, and were

now indulging in copious draughts of ale and metheglin.

Large flagons of these beverages were set on the long narrow tables before them, and were speedily emptied, and as speedily replenished.

The revelry was somewhat noisy, but it was quite good-humoured. The minstrels, who had played at the May-pole, were among the company, enlivening them with their strains, and now and then with a song.

Chaucer very much enjoyed the scene, and the uproarious merriment that occasionally arose did not in the slightest degree disturb him.

But he did experience some annoyance from an ill-favoured fellow, with red locks, and an unpleasant expression of countenance, whose eye was constantly upon him.

On inquiring who this individual was

from the host, he learnt that he was Shaxton, the tax-collector.

To return to the guests in the room. Among them at the next table to Chaucer sat Messer Benedetto; and as the Lombard merchant and the poet were previously acquainted, a good deal of conversation naturally took place between them.

But their discourse was on general topics. Messer Benedetto made no allusion to the object of his visit to Dartford; nor did Chaucer mention what had brought him thither.

Even when the host spoke of Shaxton, Messer Benedetto did not care to own that the impudent tax-collector was in his employ.

Later on, however, when Wat Tyler made his appearance, the Lombard merchant turned away, and began to talk to those on his other side.

The burly smith did not enter the room, but stationed himself near the window; and thus placed, he could converse as freely with the poet as if he had been inside.

Shaxton made another attempt to listen to their discourse; but Wat's angry looks soon drove him away.

It had already become dusk, when some excitement was caused by the arrival of three well-mounted travellers, who came from the direction of Rochester.

They reined in their palfreys when they reached the inn, and gazed into the doorway in quest of an attendant to take their orders.

So muffled up were these persons in their hoods, and so enveloped in their mantles, that little could be discerned either of feature or figure; but they seemed young, and certainly, from the haughtiness of their manner, might be presumed to be noble.

Before they could alight, the host went out to them, and, with many obsequious bows, expressed his deep regret that he could not offer them a lodging, inasmuch as his house was quite full.

"We do not require a lodging," replied one of them, who appeared to be the chief of the party, in a haughty tone. "We merely need a draught of wine."

"That you can have, and of the best, noble sirs," replied Baldock. "Gascoigne or Rhenish, Gaillac or Osey. Will it please you to alight?"

The horseman, however, declined; but bade him bring a flagon of good Gascoigne wine.

"Stay!" cried another of the party. "Where can I find a smith? My horse hath cast a shoe."

"The smith can be readily found, for he is here at this moment," replied Baldock.

"But I cannot answer that he will do the job—'tis somewhat late, and he may have closed his smithy."

"I will pay him double—nay, treble. I would not have my charger lamed for a hundred crowns," cried the other.

"I will tell him what you say," replied the host, hurrying off.

Presently he returned with a large flagon of wine and a drinking cup.

"Wat Tyler, the smith, will attend you anon, noble sir," he said, filling the cup, and offering it to the one whom he took to be the chief of the party.

"Here is he, to speak for himself," added Baldock, as the stalwart smith could be seen making his way towards them through the villagers.

At this intimation, two of the party turned away their horses' heads, while the third pushed forward to meet the smith.

"Your horse wants a shoe, I understand?" said Wat.

"Ay," replied the other. "Name thy fee."

"A groat for every nail, and three groats for the shoe," replied Wat. "My smithy is close at hand; I shall be ready by the time you have drunk a cup of wine."

So saying, he strode off.

XVIII.

THE SMITH AT THE SMITHY.

ON arriving at the smithy, Wat threw open the door, and divesting himself of hood and surcoat, and pulling up the sleeves of his jerkin, seized the bellows with a vigorous arm, and soon blew up a flame in the forge.

None of his men were there, but he did not need their aid, and in a few minutes the glowing iron was ringing on the anvil.

By this time he expected that the young noble who had commanded his services would have appeared; but, seeing nothing of him, he paused in his task to listen.

No sound was heard except the distant

shouts and laughter of the revellers at the hostel.

He did not, however, doubt for a moment that the nobleman would come, and controlled his impatience as well as he could.

But five minutes more elapsed, and he then resolved to wait no longer.

"I will not shoe his horse now if he will give me a golden mark for the job!" he muttered. "These nobles think that a base mechanic must needs bide their pleasure; but this springal shall find his mistake—pest on them all!"

With this he quenched the iron he had heated, resumed his hood and surcoat, and prepared to shut up the smithy.

The moon had now risen above the trees near the priory, and, by the light her beams afforded, he could plainly perceive a small party of horsemen galloping towards him across the broad, green area.

At first he fancied these must be the young nobles he had expected, but he quickly changed his opinion. As the party drew nearer, he could not doubt, from their garb and accoutrements, that they were the Outlaw and some of his band.

He had scarcely recovered from the surprise into which he was thrown by their unexpected appearance when they came up.

"What brings thee here to-night?" he called out, in an angry voice, as Jack Straw reined in his black steed at the door of the smithy. "Say what thou hast to say, and begone. Many eyes are upon thee," he added, pointing to the assemblage at the hostel.

"By St. Nicholas! thou shouldst thank, not blame me, seeing that I have come to aid thee," rejoined the Outlaw. "Where is thy daughter?"

"My daughter! what of her?" cried the smith. "Ah! my mind misgives me!"

"Is she safe within thy dwelling?" demanded the Outlaw.

"She is gone with her mother to the hermitage in the wood," replied Wat, trembling with anxiety. "Fool that I was to allow her to go there at such an hour, but I dreamed of no peril."

"Answer me one more question," said the Outlaw. "Hath there been a young noble here with two attendants?"

"He came to the inn not half an hour ago, and he, and those with him, have since disappeared," replied Wat.

"I know where they are gone," said the Outlaw. "This daring noble means to carry off thy daughter, but I trust I am in time to rescue her. Thou art the dupe of a clever stratagem, Wat, which might have succeeded had I not chanced to hear of it."

"I see it all now!" cried the smith, almost frenzied with rage and anxiety. "That false hermit! but he shall pay dearly for his treachery! Tarry not another instant! To the rescue!—to the rescue!"

The Outlaw did not require more urging, but dashed off with his followers to the wood.

XIX.

THE HERMITAGE.

EDITHA and her mother set out for the hermitage without the slightest misgiving.

They could entertain no suspicion of Friar Gawin, who was well known to them, and who bore a high reputation for sanctity. Nor were they at all alarmed by the idea of a walk at so late an hour through the wood.

Familiar with the path that led to the cell, they could track it as readily in the gloom as in broad daylight, and had no fear whatever of molestation.

The walk through the wood proved delightful, as they had anticipated; and before

they reached their destination, the moon had risen, and showed them the hermit's solitary abode, situated in the midst of a clearing.

With the moonbeams shining upon it, the hermitage looked the picture of seclusion and peace. It was nothing more than a hut, rudely constructed by the recluse's own hand, with timber he himself had felled on the spot. The roof was thatched and overgrown with moss.

Near the door was placed a crucifix, composed of pieces of a pine-tree nailed together.

Not far from the cell there was a clear, gushing spring, which was of great benefit to the anchorite, and had probably determined him in the choice of the spot.

He was standing at the door of his cell when the pair arrived, and came forth to give them his benediction; after which he took them inside.

A taper lighted up the little apartment into which they were ushered. The furniture consisted of a rudely fashioned table, on which stood an hour-glass, and three or four stools of equally rough workmanship.

In one corner was a small crucifix, and in an inner room was the pallet on which the anchorite stretched his limbs.

Bidding his visitors be seated, the hermit took a small casket from his gown, placed it on the table, and thus addressed Editha:—

"I have a singular circumstance to relate to you, daughter," he said. "This evening, while I was reciting the *Credo*, there came a messenger to my cell; and, opening the door, said to me, 'Arise, holy father! Go to the smith's daughter, Editha, and bid her come to thy cell an hour after sunset.' 'Wherefore should I do this?' I demanded, in surprise. 'Thou art a stranger to me,

and mayst have some evil design. I will not bear thy message to the damsel.' 'Dismiss thy fears,' said the man. 'No ill will befall her. On the contrary, she will receive a gift. In proof whereof, I now deliver to thee this casket; which I charge thee to place in her own hands.' 'But why make so much mystery?' I rejoined, hesitating to take the casket. 'Why not deliver it to her thyself?' 'I do mine errand,' replied the man; 'and if the noble lady from whom I come chooses to act thus, 'tis not for me to disobey her. I am a servant, and must do as I am bidden.' 'Since thou comest from a lady, that alters the case,' I said. 'But may I not know her name?' 'I am enjoined to secrecy,' said the man; 'but thou shalt learn her name hereafter.'"

"You shall learn it now, good father," cried Editha, who had listened with great interest to the narration. "'Tis the Princess

of Wales! None but her Grace could have sent me this rich gift."

"She has sent it in a roundabout way," observed Dame Tyler, who was not altogether free from suspicion. "Besides, she has already made you one present."

"Here is the casket, daughter," said the hermit, presenting it to the young damsel. "When I learnt that it came from a noble lady, I no longer hesitated; but took it, and promised to fulfil the messenger's injunctions."

"I cannot find words to express my obligations to you, holy father," said Editha. "But the casket is unfastened. Let us see what it contains."

And as she spoke, she opened the little box, and took out a chain of pearls.

"Pearls!" she exclaimed, holding them up. "Look, mother, how beautiful they are!"

"Beautiful, indeed!" cried Dame Tyler, gazing at them with admiration.

"In good sooth they are costly ornaments!" said the hermit, holding up the taper, so that he could see them better.

"They are too costly for me!" said Editha, with a sigh.

"Nay; you must needs wear them, since they have been sent you by the Princess," remarked her mother.

"But how know I she has sent them to me?" said the damsel. "'Tis a mere guess. This chain puzzles me."

"Keep it till you hear more about it," said Dame Tyler.

"I will keep it till I have consulted the Lady Prioress," observed Editha, replacing the pearls in the box.

"Ay, the Prioress will give you good counsel," said the hermit. "But I see not why you should not wear them."

"Nor I," rejoined Dame Tyler. "Meanwhile, I will take care of the casket."

And she secured it in her pocket.

Just then a tap at the little window of the cell startled them all.

XX.

SHOWING WHO SENT THE CASKET.

HOLY Mary! what is that?" exclaimed the anchorite.

He then called out, in a voice loud enough to be heard by the person outside, "Who wants the hermit of the wood? I open not my door to a stranger!"

"'Tis the messenger who brought the casket this e'en," replied a voice. "Hath the damsel any message for me to my noble mistress?"

"Thou mayst enter," said the hermit, unbarring the door.

"Nay; let the damsel come forth to me," rejoined the man.

Having no apprehension, Editha complied with the request.

But as she issued forth, and looked about for the messenger, she perceived two or three mounted figures, partly concealed by the trees; and would have instantly retreated, had not a strong arm seized her, and, despite her cries, dragged her off.

In another instant a scarf was twined tightly round her arms, so as to prevent any struggles.

Thus bound, she was lifted from the ground, and placed in front of a horseman, who seemed to be the chief of the party.

Alarmed by her outcries, the hermit and her mother would have come to her assistance, had they not been prevented by an armed man, who planted himself at the door of the cell.

"Release me!" cried the terrified damsel to the horseman, whose arm was round her

waist as he sustained her in front of his saddle.

"Release you?—not I!" he rejoined, in an exulting tone. "I am too well pleased with the prize I have gained to part with you. I told you this morn you should be mine, and I have kept my word."

"Ah! it is he!" she cried, recoiling from him as far as possible, but he held her fast.

"You are completely in my power, damsel," he said.

"My father will hear my cries, and deliver me," she rejoined.

"Count not upon your father's aid, damsel," laughed Sir John Holland, for it was he. "I have taken care to prevent any interference on his part. The unsuspecting smith is at work at his forge. My plan has been well contrived and well executed. Ha, ha!"

"Heaven will defeat your wicked design, I nothing doubt!" she returned.

And she renewed her outcries, calling upon St. Ursula, St. Agatha, St. Julia, and all saints who succour distressed damsels, to protect her.

Paying no attention to her cries, and believing they were unheard, except by those who could render no assistance, Sir John speeded along the narrow road through the wood, intending to turn off as soon as he came to an opening he had noted on the right.

Somewhat in advance rode Sir Osbert Montacute, while behind came two well-mounted and well-armed attendants.

On a sudden Sir Osbert stopped, and after listening for a moment, rode quickly back to his leader, and said—

"There is danger in front, my lord. Horsemen are approaching. I heard them distinctly."

"Are you quite sure?" demanded Sir John.

"Quite sure; and as far as I can judge, there are five or six in the company."

Though they conferred in a low tone, Editha overheard what passed, and hoping there might be a chance of rescue, renewed her outcries.

They were immediately answered by the advancing party.

"Confusion!" exclaimed Sir John Holland. "We must fly!"

And turning his horse's head, he galloped back in the direction he had come, followed by the others.

XXI.

THE RESCUE.

WITHOUT resorting to violence, it would have been impossible to silence the affrighted damsel; and, guided by her cries, the pursuers advanced with increased rapidity, and seemed to gain on the flying party.

Sir John and his attendants had dashed past the hermitage, and entered another path that led deeper into the wood; but finding themselves close pressed, though they had not yet seen their pursuers, they agreed to separate, and Sir John, abruptly quitting his attendants, plunged into the thicket.

Not without difficulty did he force his

way through the underwood; but he deemed himself secure, for his fair captive had become insensible.

He had not, however, penetrated far into the wood, when the crashing of branches announced that one of his pursuers was at hand, and a fierce voice exclaimed, "Turn thee, vile robber and desolator, and deliver up the maid thou hast stolen. Stop, I say. Thou canst not escape me."

Sir John wheeled round instantly at the summons and drew his sword.

He had gained a small open patch, on which the moonlight fell, so that he was fully revealed to his pursuer, who burst forth next moment from the surrounding trees.

So wild and fantastic was the appearance of the horseman, that Sir John gazed at him and his sable steed with wonder, not unmingled with superstitious terror.

Recovering himself instantly, he aimed a blow at the Outlaw, which, had it taken effect, would have terminated that daring individual's career; but the other nimbly avoided the stroke, and wresting the young noble's sword from his grasp, seized him by the throat, crying out—

"Yield the damsel to me, or I will slay thee and take her!"

"Never!" exclaimed Sir John.

And by a vigorous effort he succeeded in freeing himself from the Outlaw's grasp, and assailed him with his dagger.

In the conflict that ensued, either by his master's hand or by that of the Outlaw, Sir John's charger received a mortal wound in the neck, and as the noble animal sank to the ground, the still inanimate damsel was snatched from her captor by the Outlaw.

Before Sir John could disengage himself

from his fallen steed, his successful antagonist was gone.

But he heard the sound of a horn, winded by the Outlaw to recall his band.

XXII.

EDITHA DISTRUSTS HER DELIVERER.

MEANTIME, the Outlaw, being well acquainted with the intricacies of the wood, had easily regained the narrow path leading to the village, and pursued it leisurely, in the expectation of being rejoined by his band.

As he gazed at the beautiful head now reclining upon his shoulder, evil thoughts crossed him, and he could scarcely make up his mind to relinquish the rich prize he had gained.

"The maid has fallen into my hands," he thought. "Why should I not retain her, and make her my bride? But no; that would cause a difference 'twixt me and

her father, and I must not quarrel with him now."

His gaze was fixed upon the fair face with a passionate admiration, when Editha opened her eyes and encountered his ardent glance. She was almost as much affrighted as she had previously been while in the power of the young noble.

As soon as she understood what had happened, she thanked him for delivering her, but besought him to set her down.

"Nay, I must carry you to your father, fair damsel," he said; "or I shall lose all credit with him for the slight service I have rendered you. Besides, you have scarcely strength to walk."

"Perhaps not," she replied, resigning herself unwillingly to her disagreeable position. "But you will heighten my gratitude if you will take me home quickly."

She then inquired anxiously concerning

her mother, but he could give her no information. His band, however, coming up at the moment, he despatched one of them to the hermitage.

This done, he set off at a gallop, and soon reached Wat Tyler's dwelling.

The smith was standing at his door, in a state of the greatest disquietude; and as he received his daughter from her deliverer, he clasped her to his heart.

"Thank Heaven, you are safe!" he cried. "But where is your mother?"

"You will see her presently," replied the Outlaw. "You need have no uneasiness respecting her. She is in no danger."

"And what of that false friar?" cried the smith, stamping on the ground with rage.

"Be not angered with the good hermit, father," said Editha. "You suspect him unjustly. He has been duped by this

wicked young noble. I will tell you all anon."

"Go in, then, child," said Wat, much pacified by this assurance. "I must confer with you ere you depart," he added to the Outlaw.

"Will it be safe to enter your dwelling?" demanded the other.

"Perfectly," replied Wat. "All the village has now retired to rest."

Thereupon the Outlaw sprang to the ground, and, giving his steed to one of the band, entered the cottage with the smith.

XXIII.

A SUDDEN QUARREL.

THE room was dimly lighted by a lamp, which revealed its low raftered roof, large fireplace, with the remains of a wood fire still burning on the hearth, and simple furniture, such as might be expected in a tenement of the kind.

But there were several pieces of armour hung up against the walls—a hauberk, brassarts, vanbraces, gorget, greaves, a basinet, and a buckler; and these, with some offensive arms—as a gisarme, a pole-axe, a *martel de fer*, a couple of swords, a cross-bow, and a long-bow, gave a peculiar character to the room.

It was not, however, surprising to find the weapons in Wat Tyler's dwelling; for it must be recollected that he was an armourer as well as a smith.

Nothing could be said properly to belong to Editha. She had her own little room, and it looked towards the garden.

Thither she had now retired, and kneeling before a little image of the Blessed Virgin, poured forth thanks for her fortunate deliverance.

Wat Tyler's first business was to resort to a cupboard, whence he produced a flask of wine and a couple of drinking-horns, and placing these on the table, he sat down with his confederate.

After they had solemnly pledged each other, the smith said, in a grave tone, and with a look that announced that his resolution was taken—

"Brother, after this outrage, thou wilt

not wonder that I am determined no longer to delay the rising. The signal shall be given to-morrow."

"I am glad to hear it!" cried the Outlaw. "Twenty thousand men are ready to rally round our standard as soon as it is raised. But in what manner will the signal be given?"

"I have not decided as yet," replied Wat. "But bring all the men you can muster to Dartford Brent by noon to-morrow. By that time I shall have arranged my plans, and be ready for action. My design is to proceed first to Canterbury, in order to release John Ball. By the time we arrive there, we shall have collected all our forces. Should we meet with resistance, we will sack the city; but I believe the inhabitants will receive us well. At any rate, we will despoil the Archbishop of his treasures; and when we have got all we

can, we will commence our march to London. A memorable march it shall be. Not a mansion, not a castle, shall be unvisited."

"Your thirst for vengeance is awakened, I perceive, brother," said the Outlaw.

"And will not easily be allayed," replied Wat. "These tyrannous nobles, who have so long oppressed us, who grind us to the dust, and steal our wives and daughters, shall feel our power. We will exterminate them. Drink another cup to their destruction!"

"Willingly," replied the Outlaw, emptying the horn which had been filled for him. "The hour of retribution is not far distant."

"It has been too long delayed," said Wat. "Had this attempt succeeded, I should have for ever blamed myself for my sloth."

"'Twill serve as a pretext for the rising," observed the Outlaw.

"Hark ye, brother," he continued, leaning his elbow on the table, and looking into Wat's face as he spoke; "I have a proposition to make to thee, and I doubt not thou wilt readily assent to it. I have conceived a love for thy daughter. Thou shalt give her to me as a wife."

Wat stared at him in astonishment, as if doubting whether he heard aright.

"How sayst thou?" demanded the Outlaw, after a pause.

"We will talk of this hereafter," rejoined the smith. "Thou hast other matters to think of now."

"Nay; I will not be put off thus," said the Outlaw, peremptorily. "I must have thy promise."

"I grieve to refuse thee," said the smith; "but I must answer, 'No!'"

"Give me thy reason for refusal," cried the Outlaw, controlling himself with difficulty.

"I have no reason that I care to give," replied the smith, bluntly.

"Having imperilled my life for the damsel, I have a claim to her," cried the Outlaw, with a fierce look.

"Thou hast a claim to her gratitude, but nothing more," rejoined Wat Tyler.

"By St. Nicholas! she shall be mine," cried the Outlaw, springing to his feet and drawing his sword. "And since I am treated with this indignity, I will take her. I have but to wind my horn, and my men will come to my assistance."

"Not all of you shall take her from me," cried Wat. "Thou art worse than the young noble."

And, stepping quickly back, he seized a sword that was hanging against the wall.

They were glaring fiercely at each other, neither liking to commence the attack, when, Editha, who had heard the disturbance, came forth from the inner room.

"Away with thee, girl!" exclaimed Wat. "Thou art not wanted here. Go back into thine own room, and make fast the door."

"No; I will not quit you, father," she cried, rushing up to him. "What is the cause of this sudden quarrel?"

"Thou art the cause of it, damsel," replied the Outlaw.

"I?" she exclaimed.

"Thou hast caused the quarrel, and thou canst end it with a word," he continued. "Wilt thou share my fortunes?—wilt thou be my wife? Say 'yes,' and not twenty fathers shall keep thee from me."

"If she consents, thou shalt have my consent also," remarked Wat.

"Thou dost hear, damsel?" cried the Outlaw.

"In refusing thy demand, for such it would seem to be," replied Editha, scarcely attempting to conceal the aversion with which he inspired her, "my father has done well. I am much beholden to thee for the great service thou hast rendered me; but thou wilt cancel the obligation if thou dost press thy suit."

"Enough! I have been moonstruck," cried the Outlaw, sheathing his sword. "Thy pardon, damsel. I would not have thee hate me, though thou canst not love me. Thou wilt not think worse of me for this, brother," he added to Wat. "The fit is past, and will not return."

And he extended his hand to the smith, who grasped it heartily, and their reconciliation was complete.

Just then there was a knock at the door, and next moment it was partly opened, and one of the Outlaw's followers thrust in his head.

XXIV.

MESSER BENEDETTO IS CAPTURED BY THE ROBBERS.

"WE have just stopped a mounted traveller, captain," said the robber, addressing his leader.

"Whence comes he," demanded the Outlaw.

"Only from the inn," replied the robber.

"From the inn—art sure?"

"Quite sure," returned the robber. "We saw him start. Shall we detain him?"

"It may be Messer Benedetto, the rich Lombard merchant," said Wat to the Outlaw. "If so, he would be a great prize to us at this moment."

"Let him be brought in," said the Outlaw to his follower.

"Retire, daughter," said Wat to Editha, "and come not forth again, unless I summon thee."

As she disappeared a portly personage was pushed in through the outer door, which was immediately closed behind him.

"'Tis he—'tis the Lombard merchant," observed Wat, in a low tone to his confederate.

"Why am I thus hindered on my journey?" inquired Messer Benedetto, much alarmed by the appearance of the Outlaw. "You mean me no harm, I trust?"

"You must give an account of yourself, Messer Benedetto, before I can permit you to proceed on your journey," said the Outlaw. "I am an officer of justice."

"I should have thought otherwise," observed Benedetto. "Thou lookst as if

thou wouldst avoid all officers of justice. But how have I incurred suspicion?"

"What is your motive for setting out at this late hour from the inn?" demanded the Outlaw, in an authoritative voice.

"Simply the desire to arrive betimes in London to-morrow," replied Benedetto.

"But you intended to sleep at the inn," observed Wat. "You must have changed your mind suddenly."

"There is nothing wrong in that, methinks," rejoined Benedetto. "It occurred to me that I had some important business to transact to-morrow, which I had forgotten."

"Humph!" exclaimed Wat, shrugging his shoulders, incredulously. "You have not omitted to leave special instructions with your tax-collector, Shaxton, I'll be sworn!"

"I have not troubled myself about him," replied Benedetto.

"It is not prudent to travel without an escort," said the Outlaw. "You may fall into the hands of robbers. There are many depredators about. For a trifling fee, I and my men will see you safely on your road."

"But what surety have I that you are not leagued with robbers?" said Benedetto.

"I leagued with robbers!" exclaimed the Outlaw, indignantly. "Have I not already told you I am an officer of justice? I will escort you freely for a mile; but if I go further, I and my men must be paid."

"I gladly accept your offer," said Benedetto. "Am I at liberty to depart?"

"Assuredly," replied the Outlaw. "I have no desire to detain you, now that I am satisfied you have no ill design. Thou wilt see me to-morrow, friend, at the appointed hour," he added, with a significant look at the smith. "Good night!"

He then went forth with Messer Benedetto, and called for the merchant's horse.

As it was brought, he gave some orders to his men in a low voice.

Almost immediately afterwards, the self-styled officer of justice and his unsuspecting companion were riding together side by side past the priory and on the road to London.

Any fears that Wat Tyler might have entertained as to the safety of his wife were set at rest by her appearance as soon as the Outlaw and those with him had departed.

XXV.

THE HOUR APPROACHES.

NOTWITHSTANDING the agitation and excitement of the previous night, Editha attended matins, as usual, at the priory.

After the service she had an interview with the Lady Superior, and told her what had occurred.

The good Prioress could scarcely repress her emotion as she listened to the recital. At its close she said—

"You have, indeed, escaped a great danger, my dear child; but as another attempt may be made by this daring young noble, you must take refuge for a time within these walls. Here you will be safe,

for, unscrupulous as he is, he will not dare to commit a sacrilege."

"If my father will grant me permission, I will gladly avail myself of your offer, holy mother," said Editha, in accents of the deepest gratitude.

"Your father cannot refuse you, child," rejoined the Prioress. "He will understand the peril to which you are exposed as well as I do. Your mother, also, will perceive that precautions must be taken. Come to me early in the day. All shall be ready for you."

Accompanied by Sister Eudoxia, who was sent with her by the Prioress, Editha then returned to the village.

On the way thither they met the hermit, who was going to offer explanations to Wat, but Editha told him they were unnecessary, as her father was perfectly satisfied he had been imposed upon.

Relieved by this assurance, the good man went back to his cell.

It was a beautiful morning, and, enlivened by the sunshine, the village presented a bright and cheerful aspect.

But to those who could understand them, there were indications that a storm was gathering, which might ere long burst forth.

Some groups were collected on the green, and those composing them had sullen countenances and lowering brows.

Wat Tyler was haranguing one of these assemblages, and as he was posted on the stump of a tree, his burly frame could be distinctly seen above the heads of his auditors.

That his speech was inflammatory might be guessed from the excited gestures and murmurs of those who listened to it. At one time their murmurs rose to a roar of

indignation, but the ebullition was checked by Wat.

Soon afterwards he quitted his post, and his hearers dispersed, but not till they had promised to be ready for the signal.

Drawn forth by the beauty of the morning, Chaucer had strolled out upon the green, and watched from a distance the assemblage just described. He had easily distinguished Wat Tyler, and quite comprehended the purport of his harangue. Having heard of the attempt made overnight to carry off Editha, he did not wonder at her father's indignation.

From the menacing look of the concourse as they dispersed, Chaucer was inclined to think they would soon re-assemble, and that a disturbance would then infallibly take place.

While he was thus reflecting, he saw Wat Tyler coming towards him, and advanced to meet him.

"You have heard of the outrage done me?" said the smith, after a salutation had passed between them.

"I have," replied Chaucer; "and I perceive you are already taking steps to avenge it. But beware lest you proceed too far."

"As well might you attempt to arrest the bolt of heaven in its course as stay me now," rejoined the smith, fiercely. "Be warned by me, Master Geoffrey Chaucer. Unless you mean to join the rising, set forth upon your journey without delay. I will not answer for your safety."

"Have you thought over what I said to you respecting the Duke of Lancaster?" demanded Chaucer. "Rise in his name, and I will stay with you."

"We are not for any faction, but for the establishment of our rights," rejoined Wat. "Were John of Gaunt here in person, he would not obtain a single follower. But I

again urge your immediate departure. Blame me not if harm befalls you."

"Is the outbreak so near at hand?" asked Chaucer.

"Question me not—depart in peace!" rejoined the other.

Chaucer, however, manifested very little uneasiness.

"I will not depart till I have bidden adieu to thy fair daughter, and congratulated her on her escape."

"Come with me, then," cried Wat. "By this time, she must have returned from the priory."

XXVI.

THE SIGNAL.

AS they walked on, a man, noticeable for his insolent deportment and ill-favoured countenance, was seen to enter the smith's cottage.

"Is not that Shaxton, the tax-collector?" remarked Chaucer.

"Ay, 'tis he," rejoined the smith, moodily. "I shall have a word with him when he comes forth. Bide here for a moment, I pray you, sir."

Suddenly, a loud scream was heard from the cottage, and caused Wat to start forward; but before he could reach the door, his wife burst forth.

"What has happened? Speak, woman!" he vociferated.

"The villain has insulted our daughter!" she rejoined.

"Ha!" ejaculated Wat, with a roar like that of a lion.

And flying to the smithy, the door of which was standing open, he snatched up a heavy hammer.

Just as he reappeared, armed with his formidable weapon, Shaxton came forth from the cottage, and they stood face to face.

Appalled by the smith's terrible expression of countenance, the caitiff recoiled.

But his audacity did not entirely forsake him, and he exclaimed—

"In the King's name, I charge thee to let me pass, fellow! I have but demanded my lawful tax—the damsel is over age!"

"Thou liest, villain!" cried Wat.

And lifting the hammer with both hands,

he brought it down with tremendous force on the head of the miserable wretch, crushing him to the earth.

As Shaxton dropped lifeless to the ground, Dame Tyler rushed into the cottage with a shriek; while Chaucer, horrified at the occurrence, remained transfixed to the spot.

Next moment, several other witnesses of the incident came up.

"Thou hast done well, Wat!" they cried. "The villain deserved death!"

"I have struck the blow for freedom!" he rejoined.

And rearing aloft the blood-stained hammer, and setting his foot on the body of the wretch he had slain, he shouted, in a stentorian voice, "Liberty!"

The cry awakened a hundred echoes. Shouts of "Liberty!" resounded on all sides.

The signal had been given, and answered.

As if by magic, some two hundred insurgents appeared before the smith's dwelling.

They were all provided with weapons of various kinds—clubs, pole-axes, gisarmes, scythe blades, or blades like a hedging-bill, glaives, pikes, swords, two-handed swords, broad-bladed daggers, bows, cross-bows, and slings. Some few wore parts of armour—old hauberks, leather-jacks, and skull-caps; but these were the exceptions.

Mark Cleaver, the butcher, was armed with a falchion, with which he hacked off Shaxton's head, and stuck it on a pike.

As he held it up, a ferocious shout arose from the beholders.

At the commencement of this tumultuous scene, Chaucer endeavoured to make his escape; but he was captured by Elias Liripipe and Grouthead, each of whom was provided with a sword, besides smaller weapons.

They detained him, till their leader's pleasure should be ascertained.

Meanwhile, Wat had entered his dwelling, and hastily donned a breastplate and skull-cap; arming himself, at the same time, with a sword and dagger.

While thus employed, he called for his daughter; but she came not. However, he learnt from his wife, who appeared from the inner room, looking terribly frightened, that Editha had flown with Sister Eudoxia to the priory.

"It is well," observed Wat. "I meant to send her thither. Do thou take refuge there likewise."

"Nay; I will not quit this cottage!" she rejoined. "Oh, Wat!" she added, grasping his arm, and striving to hold him back, "thou art going to thy destruction!"

"I cannot turn back, if I would!" he rejoined, sternly, and with an expression such

as she had never before seen in his countenance. "My work is already begun! A week hence, no name in England will be so much dreaded as mine! Fare thee well!"

XXVII.

THE INSURGENTS MARCH OUT OF DARTFORD.

WHEN Wat came forth, he found that a fully-equipped steed had been brought him by one of the minstrels, who had thrown off his disguise.

As he sprang into the saddle, a loud shout greeted him. Waving his sword to the assemblage, he called out—

"Brothers! let us march to deliver our country from oppression! Our cry will be, 'St. George for Merry England!'"

"Ay, England will soon be 'Merry England' once more," responded several voices.

"I much fear not," thought Chaucer.

The poet then besought his captors to

take him to their leader, and they complied; but Wat, who had now assumed a tone and look of authority, refused to liberate him.

"'Tis your own fault that you are a prisoner, Master Chaucer," he said. "I shall detain you as a hostage."

"At least let me have my horse," said the poet.

"Pledge me your word that you will not attempt to escape, and the request shall be granted—not otherwise," rejoined Wat.

The pledge being given, he continued—

"We shall halt for awhile near the inn, and then your horse shall be brought you."

"Now, follow me!" he vociferated, putting himself at the head of the insurgents.

Shouting loudly, and brandishing their weapons, the whole party then began to march towards the centre of the village.

About twenty paces in front of the

mounted leader strode Mark Cleaver, bearing Shaxton's head on the pike.

A sort of body-guard to Wat was formed by four individuals, who, from their strange arms and accoutrements, presented a very grotesque appearance.

Two of these were Crispin Curthose, the shoemaker, who had put on an old piece of body armour of Edward the Second's time, and Peter Crust, the baker, who was furnished with a pair of gauntlets, a battered helmet, and a pole-axe; the other two were Elias Liripipe and Josbert Grouthead.

Behind marched Chaucer, with a guard on either side of him.

The progress of the insurgents was intentionally slow, for they felt sure their numbers would be increased.

Nor were they disappointed. Partly from fear, partly from goodwill to the cause, the villagers received them enthusiastically.

Ere long, another hundred men had joined the party; but as most of these were unarmed, they were sent to collect all the weapons of every kind that could be found in the village, with a tolerably satisfactory result.

When the insurgents halted opposite the inn, Baldock, who was expecting their arrival, stepped forward, and saluting the leader deferentially, offered him and his followers the best liquors his house could furnish.

"Thou dost not expect payment, Baldock?" said Crispin Curthose.

"Payment—no!" quoth the host; "I am too happy to supply you."

"Bring a flask of malvoisie, then, and four drinking-cups," cried Curthose, authoritatively.

"Your worship shall be obeyed," replied Baldock, bowing.

"Call me not 'worship,'" said Curthose. "I am one of the people. Henceforward there will be no distinctions. All men will be equal. The shoemaker will be as good as he for whom he worketh."

"Or rather, no more shoes and jerkins will be made," said Liripipe.

"And no more bread will be baked—at least by me," said Peter Crust.

"Then we must go barefooted, and uncovered, and I shall soon be bareboned," observed Baldock. "Since all are to be equal, and I may not have enough for the whole assemblage, will it please you to drink wine or mead?"

"Beshrew thee for a knave!" cried Grouthead, fiercely. "We have drank ale and mead long enough. Naught but the choicest wines will serve our turn now. Bring the malvoisie without more ado."

"Go, broach a cask of ale, Baldock—that

will suffice," interrupted Wat Tyler, authoritatively. "And, hark ye!" he added; "let Master Chaucer's horse be brought forth at once from the stable."

"Hath Master Chaucer joined you?" cried the host, in surprise.

"Not of his own free will," said the poet. "Bear record of that, good Baldock."

The host hurried off to execute the orders he had received; and fearing that his present customers would help themselves if there was any stint, he caused them to be abundantly supplied with ale—a cask being quickly broached for that purpose, as suggested by Wat.

Chaucer's horse was likewise brought from the stable, and the poet felt much more at ease when he was again in the saddle.

After half an hour's delay, during which there were further additions to the insurrectionary party, Wat Tyler became impatient

to set off; and he was therefore well pleased when a mounted messenger galloped into the village, and informed him that his brother chief awaited him, with a large body of men, on Dartford Brent.

On receiving this satisfactory intelligence, Wat immediately gave the word to march, and the party set forth in the same order as before; but making rather more noise, in consequence of the strong ale they had drunk.

All the old men, women, and children, who were left in the village, bade them adieu. The priests belonging to St. Edmond's Chapel likewise came forth to look at them, but bestowed no blessing on the expedition.

Mark Cleaver still continued in front, but, on crossing the Darent, he planted the pike, on which the wretched collector's head was fixed, in the centre of the little wooden

bridge, and there it remained for many a day, a ghastly memorial of what had occurred.

Shaxton's body was cast into a ditch, for the clergy refused it Christian burial.

XXVIII.

THE MARCH TO ROCHESTER.

AS soon as Wat Tyler and his party appeared on the brow of Dartford Hill, a loud shout arose from another body of insurgents, who were waiting for them at a short distance on the plain.

At the same time, the outlaw, who was at the head of this second party, galloped forward to meet Wat, and offer him his congratulations.

As the two leaders rode on together, they held a brief council, during which they decided to march on at once to Rochester, where Jack Straw affirmed they were certain to be well received by the inhabitants, and

must necessarily obtain a large accession of force.

This being agreed upon, as soon as the two bodies of insurgents had met and fraternized, they set off across the plain, following the course of the old Roman Road, known as the Watling Street.

Jack Straw's party was not so numerous as that of his brother chief, but several of the men were mounted, and this was a great advantage, since they could act as emissaries. Two of them, indeed, were sent on to Rochester, and others were despatched to different little villages on the road, to inform the inhabitants that the rising had taken place.

The Outlaw had a prisoner, for whom he expected a large ransom.

This was Messer Benedetto.

Instead of escorting him on the road to London, he had taken him into the forest,

where the luckless Lombard merchant was compelled to pass the night, and he was now guarded by two of the band. To add to his disquietude, he had just heard of Shaxton's direful end.

Under these circumstances, it was some little comfort to him to meet with a friend; and when the two insurgent parties combined their forces, he and Chaucer were allowed to ride together.

It was a strange sight to see this wild rout of peasants, armed and accoutred in the strange manner described, and commanded by leaders wild as themselves, sweep like a dark ominous cloud, across the sunny plain; and those who watched the course of the cloud could not doubt that it boded destruction.

Ever and anon came other peasants, armed with scythes, to swell the ranks, and these recruits were received with shouts.

No one gazed at it, no one even thought of it, and yet the prospect from that plain on that brilliant day was enchanting. There, at the foot of the hill, was the broad, winding river, glittering in the sunshine, with the picturesque Essex shore. There were Greenhithe and Swanscombe, Southfleet, and Northfleet, yet none looked towards them, unless it might be Chaucer and Benedetto.

Ere long, however, the bright prospect was completely lost to sight, for the insurgents plunged into a forest so dense and intricate, that none but the Outlaw and his band could have guided them safely through it.

So thick were the trees, that the sunbeams could not penetrate between the branches, and the wood was sombre even on that splendid day.

For nearly two hours the insurgents were

involved in the wood, and when they came forth, Rochester, with its towering castle, then in its full strength and grandeur, lay beneath them, about a mile off.

Here the two chiefs ordered a halt till their emissaries returned; but they were soon made easy in regard to them, for as they looked towards the town, a party of horsemen was seen to cross the bridge over the Medway, and ascend the hill on which the insurgents were stationed.

With this troop were the two messengers.

Satisfied, therefore, that no hostile design was intended, the insurgents marched on to meet their confederates, and were enthusiastically welcomed,

Hothbrand Corbrigge, the leader of the party, lauded Wat Tyler for the bold step he had taken, and assured him that the people of Rochester were all favourable to the cause.

"Fear not to enter the town," he said; "but come with us, and we will make you all heartily welcome; and since, as we understand, you intend to proceed to Canterbury to-morrow, many of us will go with you."

"But what of the constable of the castle?" said Wat. "Sir John de Newtown is devoted to the King; and when he sees us enter Rochester, he will suspect our design, and demand that we be delivered up to him."

"Sir John de Newtown is a brave knight," replied Hothbrand; "but he hath had too much experience of the people of Rochester to trouble them, unless they molest him. While you are under our safeguard, he will allow you to tarry within the town as long as you list, and to depart peaceably."

"On our return from Canterbury, when we have received all the reinforcements we

expect, we will summon the constable to surrender the castle," said the Outlaw. "If he refuses, we will besiege him."

"We will help you," rejoined Hothbrand. "And though Rochester Castle is deemed impregnable, it can be taken by surprise, as we will prove to you."

They then descended the hill, and proceeded towards the town.

XXIX.

FROM ROCHESTER TO HARBLEDOWN.

THE approach of the insurgents was watched by armed men from the walls and towers of the castle; but as Hothbrand rode between the two rebel leaders, and as the townspeople were preparing to give them welcome, no attempt to interfere was made by the garrison.

At that time, the bridge across the Medway was built of wood, though, a few years afterwards, it was superseded by a stone bridge that endured to the present century.

The earlier bridge, with which we are concerned, was defended by a strong wooden tower and great gates; but the tower

being now occupied by friends, and the gates thrown wide open, the insurgents marched into the town triumphantly, and were hailed by the inhabitants as deliverers of the country.

Well-lodged and feasted, they made themselves merry; but the leaders took care to prevent their followers from committing any excesses.

While their captors were feasting and revelling, Chaucer and Benedetto were locked up in a tower. However, they were well supplied with eatables and wine.

At night, a great meeting was held in the market-place, at which it was resolved that a party under the command of Hothbrand should proceed on the morrow to Maidstone, and after collecting all the auxiliaries they could in that town, should march to Canterbury, and join Wat Tyler and his host.

Accordingly, next morning, soon after daybreak, Hothbrand, attended by some thirty horsemen, set off on his mission.

Somewhat later, the populace began to assemble, and great numbers having agreed to accompany the insurgents to Canterbury, the two leaders at length sallied forth, at the head of a vast horde, and took the way to Sittingbourne.

The Rochester men greatly outnumbered those of Dartford, but there was no rivalry or jealousy among the two parties, both being bound in the same confederacy, and though the new recruits had captains of their own, they all acknowledged Wat Tyler and Jack Straw as their leaders.

Most of the Rochester men were on foot, but some few were on horseback. An important addition had, however, been made to the rebel force by a band of archers.

Had it not been for these, Sir John de

Newtown, the constable of the castle, would have attacked them, as they quitted the town.

The two prisoners, who had hoped they might be left behind, were taken on.

Nothing particular occurred during the march to Sittingbourne; but on the arrival of the insurgents at that ancient town, they were enthusiastically received by the inhabitants, and the two leaders and the numerous captains were feasted at the famous old hostel, the "Red Lion."

On this occasion, Chaucer and his fellow captives were allowed to partake of the feast.

Their forces being largely increased at Sittingbourne, the insurgents next proceeded to Faversham, where they halted for the night, and took possession of the abbey, to the great discomfort of the monks.

Next morning they were joined by Hoth-

brand with three hundred men on horseback from Maidstone.

Ever since the outbreak the weather had been splendid, and the day on which the rebel host set out from Faversham to Canterbury was quite as fine as those that had preceded it.

As they went on, more peasants joined them from Ospringe and other places, "leaving all their business," says the good old chronicler Holinshed, "letting plough and cart stand, forsaking wife, children, and houses."

The insurgents then went a little out of their way to mount Boughton Hill, from the summit of which a magnificent prospect was obtained, including not only the Swale and the Isle of Sheppey, with a glittering expanse of sea, but the ancient city towards which they were marching.

From this eminence, the golden angel,

which then crowned the great lofty spire of the cathedral (the cathedral then had a spire, be it noted, and was regarded with much reverence by pilgrims), could be distinctly seen; and as the insurgent leaders, who were not devoid of superstition, gazed at it, they thought that the figure had a flaming torch in its hand, and beckoned them on to burn and ravage.

From Boughton Hill the vast forest of Blean extended almost to Canterbury, and having satiated themselves with the splendid view we have described, the insurgents took a narrow road that led through the wood, and did not reappear till they reached Harbledown.

The venerable pile now burst upon them in all its grandeur. But the aspect of the golden angel on the spire seemed changed. Frowns clothed its brow, and instead of beckoning them on, it signed to them to retire.

Such, at least, was the notion of some of those who gazed at it.

Part of the old walls on this side of the city, together with the west gate, had been recently rebuilt by Simon de Sudbury, then Archbishop of Canterbury, so that they formed a striking contrast to the ancient habitations near them.

While the insurgents were marching towards the city, though still under cover of the wood, a splendid cavalcade of nobles, knights, and dames, attended by an escort of armed men, issued from the gate just mentioned, quite unconscious of the danger they were exposed to.

It was the Princess of Wales and her train, returning from the pilgrimage. They had not gone very far when a loud shout startled them, and the rebel host burst from the wood.

XXX.

THE REBEL CHIEFS HOLD A CONFERENCE WITH THE PRINCESS.

AT the sight of the insurgents, Sir John Holland, who was near the Princess, urged her to ride back to the city as fast as she could; but, with extraordinary spirit, she refused, saying—

"I will speak to these men. I am not afraid of them. They will do me no harm."

"You know not what you do, madam!" cried Sir John, who had recognised the two insurgent leaders, and well knew he had no mercy to expect from them. "You will sacrifice us all. What can we do against that infuriated rabble?"

"Leave them to me!" replied his mother,

undauntedly. "I feel sure I can pacify them, but not if you are with me, for you are the special object of their dislike. My ladies will stay with me."

"We will," they cried, pressing towards her.

"Fly, instantly, I command you!" cried the Princess, authoritatively, to her son. "You will only endanger my safety! Take all the nobles and knights with you, but leave the armed escort with me."

"You hear what the Princess says, my lord?" exclaimed Sir John. "Shall we obey her?"

"We must!" replied Sir Osbert Montacute.

Most reluctantly did Sir John, with the whole of the nobles, knights, and esquires, ride back towards the city, leaving the courageous Princess undefended, except by the armed escort.

Sir John and his party did not, however, enter the city, but drew up about a bow-shot from the west gate, to await the result.

Meantime, the summit of the gate was crowded with armed men, and others appeared on the watch-towers, but none of them showed any disposition to take part against the rebels.

Surrounded by her ladies, with her confessor, her physician, her almoner, her pages, and all her personal attendants behind her, the Princess calmly awaited the approach of the insurgents.

When they came up, the two leaders motioned back their followers, and advanced towards her.

Awed by her majestic looks and deportment, both the fierce men felt compelled to show her a certain deference.

" Why do I see you in this warlike array,

my good friends?" demanded the Princess, in a firm, yet conciliatory tone.

"That which I hinted to your Grace at Dartford hath come to pass," rejoined Wat Tyler. "The people have risen to obtain their rights. Nor will they retire till their just demands shall be granted by the King, your son."

"I cannot confer with men in open rebellion against their Sovereign," said the Princess. "Lay down your arms, and I will willingly listen to you, and represent your grievances to the King."

These words, pronounced in a loud voice, were followed by murmurs by those who heard them.

"Princess," said Wat Tyler, sternly, "this is idle talk. Having taken up arms, we shall not lay them down till our object be attained. Of that be sure. Knowing you are a good and gracious lady, and

mean the people well, we have consented to this conference. But 'tis useless to prolong it, since it is plain it can come to nothing. Were it our pleasure, we could detain you."

"Detain me!" exclaimed the Princess.

"Alarm not yourself, madam; we have no such intent. You are free to pass on with your ladies, your personal attendants, and your escort. Tell the King what you have seen and heard. That is all we ask."

"Your Grace cannot re-enter Canterbury," said the Outlaw, seeing her glance in that direction.

"May I not take my retinue with me?" she inquired.

"No," rejoined Wat Tyler. "And if Sir John Holland falls into our hands, we will put him to death!"

"You will not advance your cause by cruelty," said the Princess. "A word ere I depart. You have a prisoner with you, I

perceive—Master Geoffrey Chaucer. Have you fixed upon his ransom?"

"Ay; a thousand crowns," replied Wat Tyler.

"There is double the sum in this purse," said the Princess. "Take it, and let him come with me."

As Wat received the richly-embroidered purse from the hand of the Princess, he told the poet he was free.

Chaucer could only express his gratitude at the moment by a profound obeisance to the gracious lady who had effected his liberation.

Encouraged by what had taken place, Messer Benedetto thus besought the Princess—

"I pray you intercede for me, gracious madam. I am willing to pay a heavy ransom!"

"'Tis Messer Benedetto, the Lombard

merchant," said the Outlaw. "He is rich enough to pay a thousand marks for his ransom; and, by St. Nicholas! I will not set him free for less."

"How say you, Messer Benedetto?" asked the Princess. "Will you pledge your word to me that you will pay the amount?"

"I will, gracious madam," he rejoined, "provided I be allowed to depart with your Highness."

"Enough!" cried the Outlaw.

And the merchant was forthwith released, and took up a position beside Chaucer at the rear of the Princess's attendants.

Riding in front, and calling out authoritatively to the peasants to stand back, the two leaders forced a passage for the Princess and those with her through the insurgent host. They were aided in the difficult task by Hothbrand and some others.

The intrepid lady showed no signs of fear at the scowling glances fixed upon her, or at the various weapons bristling around her; but her damsels did not display quite so much courage.

Even the confessor, the physician, and the pages were greatly alarmed.

The armed escort glared fiercely at the threatening crowd, and shook their fists at them. More than once a conflict seemed imminent, but it was prevented by the exertions of Hothbrand.

When Wat Tyler and the Outlaw had conducted the Princess safely through the tumultuous horde, they retired, and she rode off at a quick pace with her attendants.

At the same time, Sir John Holland, and the nobles and knights with him, who had witnessed the scene just described, turned round, and dashed through the west gate.

XXXI.

SIR JOHN HOLLAND AND HIS COMPANIONS TAKE REFUGE IN THE ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE.

NO sooner were they inside, than Sir John called to the guard to close the gate, and sound to arms; but, to his astonishment and rage, the guard refused to obey the order, saying they would not close the gate against friends and brothers.

"Friends and brothers!" exclaimed Sir John, furiously. "They are rebels and traitors! Would ye deliver the city to them? Do my bidding instantly, or I will cause you to be hanged for treacherous villains, as ye are!"

But the guard remained perfectly unmoved by the young noble's anger and threats.

Meantime, several citizens had come up, and one of them called out to the young nobles—

"Begone, if you would save your lives! Hear you not yon shouts?—see you not yon people hurrying hither? If you are caught you will be slain, or delivered to your enemies! Fly, while there is yet time!"

"My lord, it is true!" cried Sir Osbert. "A large concourse is coming along the street, and they are evidently friends of the rebels. If we stay here, we shall be caught between two fires."

"Forward, then, in the King's name!" cried Sir John, drawing his sword. "We will hew our way through the rebellious rascals if they oppose us!"

With this, he struck spurs into his charger, and, followed by his companions, galloped along the street.

Such was the impetuosity of their career,

that the citizens, though many of them were armed, made way, fearful of being trampled under foot.

Still maintaining their furious pace, and carrying terror with them, Sir John and his party rode past the cathedral to the other side of the city.

On reaching the east gate, where they meant to make an exit, they found it shut and strongly guarded.

Cross-bowmen were on the summit, and a shower of iron bolts would have been launched against them had they not withdrawn.

They then rode to the Burgate, but it was likewise closed; and doubtless all the other gates were shut.

Hitherto everything had betokened that the people were hostile to the young nobles and friendly to the insurgents, who by this time must have entered the city.

The peril, therefore, was very great, and a place of refuge must be instantly found. There were several monasteries, but the priors might be unwilling to receive them.

In this emergency, Sir Osbert Montacute proposed that they should return to the Archbishop's palace, where the Princess of Wales had been lodged during her stay at Canterbury, and Sir John approving of the suggestion, they galloped off at once to the palace.

It was a magnificent edifice, built by Lanfranc, and had been inhabited by Becket, and being surrounded by high walls, was capable of defence. In fact, it had been more than once maintained against the turbulent citizens.

When they stopped at the arched entrance, which still exists in Palace Street, the porter immediately summoned old Michael Siward, the seneschal, who, on

learning that the city was beset by rebels, and that the populace were friendly to them, was filled with indignation.

"Would that his Grace were here!" he exclaimed. "He would speak to the people, and bring them to their duty. But I will do the best I can for your protection. Enter, I pray you, noble sirs."

Thereupon the gate was thrown open, and made fast again as soon as the whole party had ridden into the courtyard.

"You are safe now, I trust, Sir John," said Siward. "I cannot think that the rebels will dare to attack the palace; but should they do so, we will defend it to the last."

After warmly thanking the seneschal for his zeal in their behalf, Sir John and his companions dismounted, and their horses were taken to the stables, which were at the further end of the courtyard.

By this time most of the household—several of whom were armed—had assembled in the courtyard, and after giving them some orders, Siward asked Sir John if he should conduct him and his friends to the great hall.

"I thank thee, no, good friend," replied Sir John. "We will remain here for the present to see what betides. To judge from the shouting and noise in the street, the rebels must have discovered that we have taken refuge in the palace, and are coming hither to demand that we be delivered up to them."

"Should the audacious demand be made, my reply will be that your lordship and those with you are under the safeguard of the Archbishop," said the seneschal; "and since his Grace would never yield you up, neither will I. If they be not content with that response, they shall have a where-

withal to satisfy them," he added significantly.

Sir John and the others laughed heartily at this speech of the stout old man.

"I doubt not we shall be able to hold out against them," pursued the seneschal; "but come what will, I engage that your lordship shall never fall into their hands."

"I have perfect faith in thee, my good friend," said Sir John.

"Then you will not think I am deserting my post if I leave you for awhile," said Siward. "The cathedral must not be neglected. Should those sacrilegious villains gain an entrance, they would not hesitate to carry off the treasures of the shrine."

"Thou art right," cried Sir John. "Go see that all needful precautions are taken to protect the shrine."

XXXII.

FRIAR NOSROCK AND THE BAN-DOGS.

AFTER reiterating his orders to the household, all of whom promised implicit obedience to his injunctions, the seneschal hurried off to the back of the palace, and unlocking a door in the walls, entered the cloisters, through which he quickly passed, thus pursuing the precise course taken by the sainted Becket when he fled from the murderous knights.

In another moment Siward was in the splendid north transept, and gazing anxiously down the magnificent nave, but beheld only a few priests and monks pacing along the aisles, with here and there a devotee kneeling at a shrine—nothing to alarm him.

He then turned towards the choir, but no irreverent intruders could be distinguished; and satisfied he was in time to prevent any desecration of the sacred pile, he went round and caused all the doors to be locked, strictly enjoining the vergers to allow no one to enter the cathedral, and to send out all persons then within the building through the cloisters.

Having taken these precautions, he repaired to the chapel of the Holy Trinity, where was the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket, the riches of which he feared would excite the cupidity of the rebels.

Many pilgrims were kneeling on the well-worn pavement before the shrine; but he did not disturb them, his object being to see Friar Nosrock, a monk, who occupied a watching-chamber above the chapel.

The window of this chamber commanded Becket's gorgeous shrine, and Friar Nos-

rock's business was to see that none of the priceless jewels adorning it were appropriated by pretended pilgrims, and so well did he perform his office, that not a single gem had been stolen.

The vigilant monk was provided with a dozen ban-dogs—huge and fierce mastiffs—which he could let loose should any nocturnal attempt be made at depredation upon the shrine.

Moreover, he had the means of ringing an alarm-bell.

In Friar Nosrock's chamber an illustrious prisoner had been confined—namely, King John of France.

The sudden manner in which Siward entered his chamber somewhat startled the monk.

"What wouldst thou, brother?" he asked.

"I am come to warn thee to look well

after the shrine," replied the seneschal. "The cathedral is in danger."

"The cathedral in danger! Holy Thomas! From whom?" exclaimed the monk, horror-stricken.

"From rebels and traitors," replied Siward. "An insurrection hath broken out among the peasantry. They have come to Canterbury in great numbers, and, instead of driving them hence, the foolish citizens have admitted them."

"'Tis all John Ball's doing!" cried Friar Nosrock. "He has stirred up the people to this point. The Archbishop ought to have hanged him."

"Very true," said Siward. "The Wickliffites are numerous in the city, I fear, and will take advantage of this outbreak to do all the mischief they can. The rebels are threatening the palace, where Sir John Holland and several young nobles and

knights, who accompanied the Princess in her pilgrimage, have taken refuge."

"Only this very morn I beheld the Princess kneeling before the shrine," said the friar. "I trust her Grace hath escaped the ribald crew?"

"Ay, she has got off, but her son and his companions are in some danger, as I have told thee. I must now go back to the palace, and see to its defence. Do thou take care of the shrine."

"Rely on me, good master seneschal," replied the monk. "Should the rebels come here, I will let loose the ban-dogs, and I warrant thee they will make havoc among the ribalds. They had better contend with a legion of fiends than with those fierce hounds," he added, with an ill-suppressed laugh.

"Hark thee, holy brother," said Siward. "We may be driven by numbers from the

palace. In that event we shall seek refuge in the cathedral. Wilt thou give Sir John Holland and his friends a lodging in thy chamber?"

"Willingly," replied the monk.

Well satisfied with the promise, the seneschal departed.

XXXIII.

THE HOSTEL IN MERCERY LANE.

MEANWHILE the whole of the insurgents had entered the city; and though strict orders were given by the leaders that the different parties of which the host was composed should keep together, the tumultuous peasantry could not be restrained, but spread about in every direction.

The main body, however, of the rebels, headed by Wat Tyler and the Outlaw, marched along the High Street, amid the shouts of the populace, who were quite as enthusiastic in their demonstrations as the people of Rochester had been.

The first object of the leaders was to

liberate John Ball, and with that view they were proceeding to the barbican; but they were spared the trouble, for before they reached the centre of the city, loud shouts, coming from the opposite direction, informed them that the monk was free; and they presently beheld him riding on a mule, at the head of a vast multitude.

With him, on horseback, were a brewer, named Richard Basset, and his son, Conrad, both Wickliffites, who had accomplished his liberation.

A joyous meeting took place between the monk and his confederates, and after they had exchanged greetings and congratulations, John Ball, who was anxious to address the people, proposed that they should repair to the Rush Market.

Intimation to this effect having been given, the vast concourse began to move towards the appointed spot. To reach it

they had to proceed along a picturesque thoroughfare, called Mercery Lane, which was full of shops and stalls where, amongst other matters, leaden brooches, stamped with the mitred head of the martyred saint, Thomas à Becket, were sold to the pilgrims. In Mercery Lane was situated the large hostel, rendered ever famous by Chaucer, and known as the "Chequers of the Hope."

Built of massive timber, this vast caravanserai contained a long upper chamber, approached by stairs from the outside, and known as "The Dormitory of the Hundred Beds." So numerous were the bands of pilgrims to the shrine of St. Thomas, that not a bed was ever unoccupied.

Besides this grand dormitory, accounted a wonder at the time, the vast building had a refectory to correspond, and a spacious court, into which the pilgrims could ride on their arrival in the city.

While the shouting concourse poured down Mercery Lane to hear John Ball's address, Curthose, Liripipe, Mark Cleaver, Grouthead, Peter Crust, and others of the Dartford men, who now exercised a sort of authority in the insurgent army, turned into the court of the "Chequers."

The place was crowded with pilgrims, all of whom were much alarmed by what was going on; but the Dartford men soon discovered the host, Nicholas Chilham, and told him, in a peremptory tone, that they meant to lodge at the "Chequers" that night, and should require the whole of the hundred beds for themselves and their comrades.

In vain Master Chilham protested that the entire dormitory was engaged. That mattered not to the Dartford heroes. They must be accommodated. All the other guests must turn out, and seek quarters

elsewhere. Moreover, Master Chilham must provide a good supper for a hundred persons.

Fearing he might have a whole host quartered upon him if he refused, the landlord promised compliance.

At the farther end of the Rush Market stood a large cross, painted and gilt, and, stationing himself in front of it, with an insurgent leader on either side, John Ball proceeded to address the concourse, which entirely filled the place. The assemblage was partly composed of insurgent peasants, partly of citizens.

It was in one of those fierce and inflammatory harangues which he had previously found so successful that the monk attempted to justify the outbreak, by showing that the people had been treated like slaves, and were forced to throw off the yoke; but his chief attack was directed against the Arch-

bishop of Canterbury, and he declared that neither the King nor the kingdom ought to submit to any episcopal see. Above all, no bishop or other ecclesiastic ought to hold an important civil office.

"As Chancellor of England," he vociferated, "Simon de Sudbury has betrayed his Sovereign, and violated the rights of the people, and he therefore deserves death."

"He shall die the death of a traitor!" cried Wat Tyler, in a loud voice. "Would we had him here!"

"We will behead him, and make thee Archbishop in his stead!" shouted several persons to John Ball.

"Were it in your power to make me Pope of Rome, I would refuse," rejoined the monk. "Like my master, John Wycliffe, I have ever preached the abolition of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and my actions shall not belie my words."

Violent cries then rose from the assemblage, and many persons called out, "Let us sack the cathedral!"

"Hold!" exclaimed Wat Tyler, in a stentorian voice. "I forbid you to enter the cathedral for any such purpose."

Some murmurs arose; but they instantly ceased, as Wat continued, "Since you want pillage, you shall have it. The Archbishop has robbed the people, and 'tis meet that his palace should be plundered. Go thither!"

"To the palace! to the palace!" shouted a hundred voices.

At this juncture, Conrad Basset, the brewer's son, called out, "Sir John Holland and the party of young nobles and knights in attendance on the Princess of Wales have taken refuge in the palace. What shall we do with them?"

"Slay them!" cried Wat. "They are a

brood of vipers that ought to be crushed!"

Prepared to execute this ferocious mandate, the concourse hurried back through Mercery Lane, and proceeded to the palace.

XXXIV.

THE SIEGE OF THE ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE.

LOUD blows, dealt against the gates of the Archbishop's Palace, warned those in the court that the rebellious concourse were endeavouring to break in, whereupon Siward, who had just returned from the cathedral, accompanied by half a dozen of the household, armed with crossbows and pikes, mounted to the top of a turret that flanked the walls, and called out to the assailants to be gone.

But as the insurgents took no heed, the cross-bowmen shot their bolts at them, and three or four were stricken down.

This occasioned a pause; but in another minute the attack was renewed, and huge

stones were hurled against the gate, but being of stout oak, it resisted all their efforts. Again the cross-bowmen endeavoured to drive back the assailants, but they themselves had now become the mark for some archers, who were mingled with the multitude, and were obliged to seek a less exposed position.

Siward alone remained on the top of the turret, and as the shafts flew quickly past him, he tranquilly adjusted his cross-bow, and smote a man who was planting a scaling-ladder against the wall.

At this juncture, the two insurgent leaders appeared among the concourse, and John Ball, who was with them on his mule, forced his way through the throng towards the gate, and, holding up his hand to enjoin a brief suspension of hostilities, thus bespoke the brave old seneschal.

"I know thee well, Siward," he said;

"and would not thou shouldst come to harm. It must be plain to thee that thou canst not hold out against this determined multitude. Open the gates, therefore, and let us in; and I will undertake that thy life, and the lives of all the household, shall be spared."

"Aught more?" inquired Siward, in a taunting tone.

"Ay, this," cried Wat Tyler, who had now come up. "We require that Sir John Holland, and the party of licentious young nobles, who have taken refuge here, be delivered up to us, that justice be done upon them."

"'Tis not for thee and thine to judge them," said Siward, scornfully. "Now hear me! I am left in charge of my master's house, and never will surrender it to robbers; neither will I deliver up noble and valiant gentlemen to be murthered by vile ribalds!"

The extreme boldness with which these words were uttered kept the hearers quiet, and the seneschal went on with unabated courage—

"As to thee, thou renegade priest," he said, addressing John Ball, "who hast stirred up all this mischief, I would his Grace had hanged thee! But I will put it out of thy power to do further ill!"

And, as he spoke, he raised his arbalest quickly to his shoulder, and let fly a bolt at the monk, which struck his cowl, but did not injure him.

"Thou wert not born to kill me!" laughed John Ball, as he took out the iron-headed dart.

Next moment, a flight of arrows passed over the turret where the seneschal had stood, but he was gone.

Redoubled efforts were now made by the insurgents to take the palace.

As it seemed a waste of time to batter against the door, scaling-ladders were planted against the high embattled walls, and up each of these half a dozen men climbed; but no sooner did they reach the embrasures, than they were hurled back.

The defending force, among whom were Sir John Holland and the young nobles, were fully prepared for them, and for some time not a single assailant was able to set foot on the battlements.

But it was quite clear the place could not hold out against such a host, and it behoved those inside to provide for their safety by a timely retreat, for no one thought of a surrender.

Accordingly, when the battlements had been cleared of the few who had gained them, and the swarm of fresh assailants had been shaken off the ladders, advantage was taken by Siward, who had previously ap-

prized them of his design, to hurry off Sir John Holland and his party to the cloisters.

Thither they were followed by the whole household, for no one desired to be left to the mercy of the rebels; and, the door being made fast behind them, they all sought shelter in the cathedral—the entrance from the cloisters being carefully secured.

The seneschal alone returned to the palace, being determined not to leave it till the last.

It being quickly discovered that the defenders had retired, the assailants therefore sprang upon the battlements, and, shouting to their friends that the palace was won, proceeded to throw open the portal, and in another minute the rebel leaders rode into the court.

No restraint being put upon them by their leaders, the insurgents rushed into the palace, and commenced the work of destruction and spoliation.

Determined, however, to prevent the desecration of the cathedral, Wat Tyler placed a strong guard at the entrance to the cloisters, giving the men strict injunctions to allow no one to pass without his express order.

He then dismounted, and accompanied by John Ball and the outlaw, entered the great hall of the palace—a noble apartment, with a richly-carved screen, a fine gallery, and a grand oak ceiling. Moreover, the hall was adorned by several fine paintings.

In this magnificent banqueting-hall kings had been entertained with almost regal splendour and hospitality, and in it the Princess of Wales dined daily with her suite during her stay at the palace.

Alas! it was now invaded by a furious throng, who, having hastily ransacked the other apartments, were piling the valuables on the tables, or throwing them on the

floor, in order to carry them off more readily.

Here were great silver flagons and cups, pieces of plate, rich vestments, curtains and tapestry, torn down from beds and walls; coffers, chests, chairs, and pieces of furniture, that could be carried off, and a hundred articles besides, that cannot be enumerated.

"The Chancellor got this chair too cheap," cried one of the plunderers.

"Ay; he made us pay for it, as he did for this silver drinking-cup," added another. "Ours they are by rights, and we will have them."

On a daïs, at the upper end of the hall, and covered by a rich canopy, was the Archbishop's throne. In order to proclaim his authority, Wat Tyler marched thither, and, ascending the platform, seated himself on the throne, while John Ball took a place on his right, and the Outlaw on his left.

From this elevated spot the three leaders surveyed the lawless proceedings of the throng, but did not choose to interfere.

While they were thus gazing around, they perceived that a prisoner had just been brought into the hall.

It was the seneschal, who had been seized by Conrad Basset while endeavouring to preserve some valuables from the plunderers.

When he was recognised, the crowd would have laid violent hands upon him, but Conrad kept them back, insisting that he should be taken before Wat Tyler for judgment.

His arms being fastened behind his back by a belt, so that he could offer no resistance, the prisoner was dragged to the upper end of the hall, amid the threats and outcries of the assemblage.

A terrible sight greeted him. There, in the Archbishop's throne, sat Wat Tyler, leaning upon his sword, with his foot on a

stool. Beside him were the rebel monk and the Outlaw.

With such judges, Siward knew that his doom was sealed; nevertheless, he maintained a firm demeanour.

Conrad and his captors now stepped back, and left him standing alone.

At this moment, the wild uproar hitherto prevailing in the hall suddenly ceased. Amid this awful hush, Wat Tyler's stern voice was heard.

"Thou art Michael Siward, seneschal, or steward, to Simon de Sudbury, art thou not?" demanded the rebel leader.

"I am chief officer of the household of his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is likewise Lord High Chancellor of England," replied Siward, boldly.

"Then thou art servant to one who has plundered the people," said Wat Tyler, yet more sternly. "Thy master will have to

give us an account of the revenues of England, and of the large sums he has levied since the King's coronation."

"The Chancellor will render no account to such vile wretches as you!" rejoined the steward. "Were his Grace in your power—which, thank Heaven, he is not—he would treat you with as much scorn as I do. Wreak your vengeance on me, if you will, but rest assured that a day of retribution will arrive."

"Thou speakest boldly, Siward," said John Ball. "Such a man as thou art might be of service to our righteous cause. Bear testimony against thy master, and thy life shall be spared."

"I will testify with my latest breath," replied Siward, "that a better man doth not exist than the Lord Chancellor; nor do I believe that the affairs of the realm were ever more wisely or more justly administered than by his Grace."

"We will hear no more!" cried Wat Tyler, in a furious tone, and starting to his feet as he spoke. "Take the false knave hence, and let him die as a traitor!"

"Traitor to whom?" demanded Siward.

"To the people," rejoined John Ball.

The seneschal was then hurried out of the hall and taken to the court, where he was told to prepare for instant death.

Turning from the bloodthirsty throng around him, and trying to shut his ears to their furious cries, the brave old man cast a look upwards at the golden angel on the spire, which was visible from the spot, and murmured a prayer.

A large billet of wood served the purpose of an executioner's block, and Siward's head was severed from the trunk by a ferocious ruffian, provided with a sharp, two-handed sword.

This tragical incident did not interfere

with the business of the insurgents, and might have been forgotten if they had not been reminded of it by the head of the ill-fated seneschal, which was fixed on the palace-gate.

Viands sufficient to furnish forth a banquet were found in the great kitchen of the palace; and the cellars being broken open, yielded an abundant supply of wine.

Thus the rebel leaders, and a considerable number of their followers, were enabled to feast in the hall, while the rest continued the work of destruction and pillage.

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